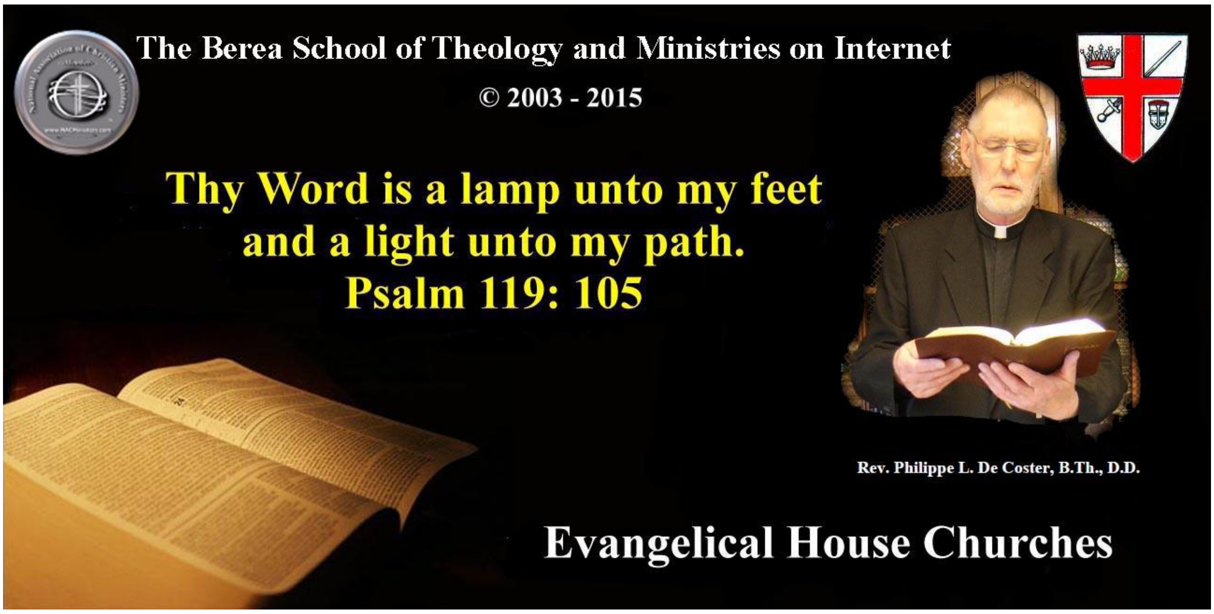


Berea Bible Handbook - Part Ten

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The Gospels Matthew and Mark

Gospel commentators: J.C Ryle and Arno C. Gaebelein (Public domain)

A Short General Introduction

> *1:* Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,
>
> *2:* Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;
>
> *3:* It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,
>
> *4:* That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. (Luke 1:1-4)

Nearly everything we know about the life and ministry of Jesus comes from the Bible's four Gospel books - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Gospels existed in oral tradition in the young Christian communities for some time before they were finally set in written form. As the eyewitnesses to the events of

Jesus' life began to pass away in the latter part of the first century, it probably became more urgent that these events be preserved in writing.

The Bible's New Testament, which includes these four Gospels, was originally written entirely in Greek, the common language of the Mediterranean lands in Roman times. The first of the Gospels was probably Mark, written around 70 A.D., about 40 years after Jesus was crucified. Matthew and Luke were written between 80 and 90 A.D. Finally, The Gospel of John appeared in its final form around 95 A.D.

All four Gospels are anonymous in the sense that none includes the author's name. The traditional names - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - did not become associated with these writings until the second century. In the early centuries of Christianity, our four Gospels coexisted with a number of other Christian writings, many of which have not been preserved. Finally, the Synod of Carthage adopted the present twenty-seven New Testament books, including the four Gospels, as the canon of the New Testament in the year 397.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the *Synoptic* Gospels because they are strikingly similar. Bible scholars believe the authors of Matthew and Luke were aware of the Gospel of Mark and incorporated much of it in their own writings, along with material from another common source that has not been preserved, plus unique material of their own.

The Gospel of John is very much different from the Synoptic Gospels in the way it presents and interprets the events of Jesus' earthly life. The Synoptics portray Jesus traveling about and preaching in parables about the coming kingdom of God, while John presents a more spiritual and meditative picture of Jesus. Both John and the Synoptics present many of the same events of Jesus' life, including His trial, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Because of the differences among the Gospels, we are tempted to ask which, if any, is the correct portrayal of the events of Jesus' life. However, each of the four is a unique view of Jesus, drawn from different eyewitnesses and different traditions, and we are fortunate to have these four "windows" to see four views of these central events of Christianity.

What is the Gospel, four narrations in one?

Gospel is a term used over 75 times in the New Testament. While it has various nuances of meaning, it's most fundamental meaning from the Greek is "good news." But good news of what? According to the Evangelical Dictionary of

Theology edited by Walter Elwell, "the gospel is the joyous proclamation of God's redemptive activity in Christ Jesus on behalf of man enslaved by sin."

Another usage of the term is to refer to specific books in the Bible that set forth the life and teaching of Jesus, for example the Gospel of Matthew, etc.

The importance of the gospel cannot be overstated. Indeed, it is the culminating concept of the entire Bible. So as the biblical writers proclaimed this good news to all, so we in turn proclaim it to our readers. As it says in the most famous of all Bible passages. Please, refer to "Self-help in New Testament Greek page 20, the Lexicon.

http://static.skynetblogs.be/media/163941/2001657147.pdf

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

John 3:16 is what most Christians would give as an answer to "what is the gospel?" But note that the word *gospel* is not actually used in this passage. So we look further for a more precise biblical definition.

In many places, the Bible uses the term "gospel of God" or "gospel of Christ." In Matthew 4:23 and Matthew 9:35 Jesus used the phrase "the gospel of the kingdom," indicating the good news that He as the Messiah was now among them to usher in the new covenant. In Matthew 26:12-13, Jesus used the term "this gospel" alluding to his coming death. In Mark 8:35, Jesus explains that the gospel is of such tremendous importance that for its sake a man must be willing to enter upon a life of complete self-denial.

For the apostle Paul, the gospel was the reason for his existence. That there would be no doubt about exactly what the gospel means, Paul specifically defines it in his first letter to the Corinthians:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

This passage offers the clearest definition of the gospel. It is indeed, perhaps the most important passage of the entire Bible. In subsequent verses (1 Corinthians 15:9-58), Paul goes on to explain the significance of the resurrection event. Because of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, we all have hope of eternal life. He stakes everything on the resurrection being an actual historical event. He insists that unless Christ's resurrection really and truly happened, our faith is in vain.

Note that in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, the first four verses define the gospel. The second four verses give an apologetic for the gospel. In other words, Paul tells us why it is true! This is significant. Those who preach the gospel without an accompanying apologetic are not preaching the gospel biblically!

Evidence for the historicity of the resurrection is part of the gospel message. He insists that the resurrection was not a figment of someone's imagination. There were over 500 witnesses, including Paul himself! By the way, this passage was not written hundreds of years after the events. Paul penned these words within 20-25 years or so after Christ's resurrection. He proclaims that if his readers do not believe it, they can go check out these things with the actual living witnesses. Scholars, incidentally, believe that the statement Paul makes in the first few verses of 1 Corinthians 15 is a formal creed used by the earliest Christians that dates back to within 5 years of Christ's death.

So the gospel is not only about an actual historical event, it is about the consequences to mankind forever.

Let's look at three other passages, this time from Paul's letter to the Romans, his letter to the Ephesians, and his letter to the Colossians:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14).

But he has now reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you have heard....(Colossians 1:22-23).

Together with the 1 Corinthians passage above, Paul makes it clear in these passages that the gospel is not something that man does. Rather, it is something that **God has done for us**. It is **God's power** through Christ and the Holy Spirit that is the gospel. This is our salvation via the medium of faith. Thus, a clear distinction should be made between *gospel* (that which we believe for our salvation) and *law* (that which explains what we are to do in response to our saving faith, as well as that which shows us the *need* for the gospel ala Romans 3:20).

So putting these passages together we see that an accurate definition of *the gospel* is this:

The *gospel* is the perfect life, atoning death, and resurrection of Jesus—which is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.

But in slightly different contexts, the writers of the New Testament use the term "obey the gospel" on three separate occasions—Romans 10:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, and 1 Peter 4:17. These passages confuse some people as they think these mean that the gospel itself is something that man has to do. Make no mistake, man must respond to God's offer of salvation. He must **receive** Christ (John 1:12); he must **repent** while believing in the gospel (Mark 1:15); he must **trust** in Christ (Romans 4:5). But obedience is a result of the gospel, rather than the gospel itself.

The context of these passages is important. If you read the verses surrounding Romans 10:16, you will see that the context is *belief*. The context of 2 Thessalonians 1:8 and 1 Peter 4:17 is the imminent return of Christ in judgment against the Jews in AD 70. The warning of "obeying the gospel" is clearly, in these two instances, a warning specifically to the first-century Jews who have rejected Jesus and were persecuting the Christians.

There is good evidence that the English term "obey" in these passages is a mistranslation that is apparently a holdover from the King James Version of the Bible. The Greek word for *obey* in the first two passages is *hupakouo.* This word is defined in *Strong's Concordance* as "to hear under (as a subordinate), i.e. to **listen attentively;** by implication to heed or conform to a command or authority—hearken, be obedient, to obey" (emphasis added). So this instruction is somewhat like what a parent might say to a recalcitrant child: "Listen up, Buster! I'm telling you the truth!" Obedience is the implied result, but it is not the focus of the message.

Similarly, the Greek word in the third passage is *apeitheo*, which means "not to allow one's self to be persuaded" or "to refuse belief and obedience."

As the notes in the Reformation Study Bible (page 1902) say, "The gospel must be accepted, believed, and obeyed (1 Peter 4:17). Its divine command is for absolute surrender to God through the peace made by Jesus Christ." But man's requirement is to respond in faith. Obedience comes **after** the proclamation of the gospel, and **after** God's work of redemption. So the gospel is one thing; obedience is another thing which follows as an expression of a living faith.

These three "obey the gospel" passages need some further explanation. It makes no sense for us to obey something that someone else has already accomplished for us. No single English word really gets at the meaning of what is most often translated as "obey." But perhaps these passages are best understood as *respect* the gospel, *welcome* the gospel, *accept* the gospel, *heed* the gospel, *believe* the gospel, or *hearken to* the gospel. Indeed, these terms are sometimes used in English translations rather than the term *obey.*

As stated by the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (page 474), the gospel "proclaims the redemptive activity of God. This activity is bound up with the person and work of God's Son, Christ Jesus." Also, as an instrument of the Holy Spirit the gospel convicts (1 Thess. 1:5) and converts (Col. 1:6). Still further, "To those who refuse the gospel it is both foolishness and a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:18ff.), but to those who respond in faith, it proves itself to be the ‘power of God unto salvation' (Rom. 1:16)."

The gospel is something to be preached and to be believed (1 Corinthians 15:11). The gospel is the proclamation of the glory of Christ rather than something we proclaim about ourselves (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). Yet the gospel has <u>implications</u> for our obedience.

Since the gospel is delivered by belief, more light on this can be shed by what is meant by “believe in” in such passages as John 3:16: “Whosoever believes **in** him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The word **in** (Greek ***eis***) really means “into” or “unto.” Since we do not have an idiom in English “to believe into” or “to believe into” it is translated “believe **in**.” But the meaning is deeper than mere intellectual assent (James 2:14-19). It implies that we believe so deeply in Jesus that we will commit our whole being and obedience to him.

As explained in James 2, we are saved by a particular *type* of faith. We are saved by a *living* faith, as opposed to a dead faith. In other words, we are saved by a

faith that is obedient. But it is not the obedience that saves, but rather the faith itself.

The gospel, by the way, is the same in the Old Testament as in the New Testament. See Romans 1:1-3, Romans 4, Galatians 3:8, Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Let's take a further moment and comment on what the gospel is ***not***.

- It is not, "Have your best life now"—as a popular TV preacher proclaims.
- It is not, "Jesus came to be your best friend."
- It is not sacramental. Paul specifically states in 1 Corinthians 1:17-18 that the gospel does not include baptism.
- It is not placing one's trust in the church, but rather in Christ's finished work on the cross.
- It is not something that we must do.
- Further, it is not the so-called social gospel. (The social gospel is a response by certain liberal Christians who began to doubt the Bible and its miracles, including the bodily resurrection of Christ. Left with no gospel at all, these professing Christians turned to social action in society as their focus and redemption.)
- Nor is the gospel the whole of the New Testament, which some Christians who tend toward legalism think.



While being baptized, responding in obedience, being faithful to the church, or caring for the downtrodden, etc. are important—but these are not the gospel in the first place. **The gospel is the good news that Christ lived a perfect life,**

died on the cross, and rose from the dead to satisfy God's wrathful judgment on the world. Because of Jesus' payment in full for OUR debt, it is now possible for anyone to receive salvation through a living faith in Christ.

The Four Canonical Gospels of the Bible

and the Apocryphal Writings

According to the Gospel of Luke there were many gospels written. Luke 1:1-4 states, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to put together an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were from the beginning eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed down to us, it seemed to me too, after researching everything for a long time, that I should write accurately and orderly for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you would realize the certainty of the matters about which you have been instructed."

What is really the Gospel?

The word "Gospel" means "good news" in Greek. The gospel is best explained in I Corinthians 15:3-4 "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (NIV).

What are the Apocryphal Gospels

There were a number of gospels written in the second century AD. or later called the Apocryphal Gospels. There are 22, of which 10 are written in Greek and 12 in Latin. These can be divided into three categories: those relating to the history of Mary and Joseph, the infancy of Christ, and the history of Pilate. Most of these are based on the Protevangelium of James, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Acts of Pilate. Collection of Apocryphal Gospels. See also The Complete Gospels ed. by Miller/Funk published by Harper Collins, 1992.

Gospel of Thomas

Some may refer to the Gospel of Thomas as the fifth gospel. This is a Gnostic writing, though some scholars may see some of the sayings of Jesus in this gospel as genuine. There are 114 sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas.

Thomas

"Thomas," of course, is not a proper name. Much the same way "Peter" was a nickname, "Thomas" is simply Aramaic for "twin." The Greek of John clarifies Thomas is also called "Didymus" (Didumoj,)) the name which appears in the incipit. Unfortunately, "Didymus" is Greek for "twin", so we have 'twin called the twin.' The incipit further clarifies that his real name was Judas, which is echoed by the Book of Thomas (NHC II,7) and the Acts of Thomas. Most importantly, Eusebius, in his commentary on the twelve apostles, also sites his true name as Judas" Some scholars think Thomas is James the brother of Jesus.

Discovery

Twelve books were discovered in 1945 by 2 peasant brothers near Nag Hammadi, Egypt. These books are called the Nag Hammadi Library. The books were hidden in a sealed jar. They were taken to Priest’s home for safety because of blood vengeance. Department of Antiquities took the books. They are now preserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, Egypt.

Coptic Language

The Gospel of Thomas is written in Coptic. Coptic is late Egyptian language written in Greek letters. Early Christianity in Egypt wrote in Coptic. There are still Coptic Churches in Egypt that use Coptic today.

Originally written in Greek

The Coptic Gospel of Thomas was translated from the Greek. Fragments of this gospel in the original Greek version were found in the Oxyrhynchus, Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century. Biblical texts were also found. Oxyrhynchus Papyri 1, 654 and 655, were identified as parts of The Gospel of Thomas only after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library. Greek papyri 1 contains sayings 26-30, 77, 31-33 in this order, and the other two the sayings 1-7 and 36-40, respectively.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism is primarily a religion of salvation that came through secret knowledge. The Greek word for “knowledge” is "Gnosis." The Gospel of Thomas is a Gnostic writing. The opening words are "These are the secret words which the Living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote" (p.3, Guillaumont, et al, 1959, Leiden: Brill).

The Colossian Heresy

Paul in the book of Colossians warned about heresy that may be the early roots of gnosticism. Paul warns about: secret knowledge (2:18; 2:2-3), asceticism (2:21) angel worship (2:18), Low view of Christ (1:15-20), and reliance on human wisdom and tradition (2:4,8), see NIV study notes.

I John warning Heresy

I John also warns of early gnosticism which was a major threat to Christianity in the first two centuries. Gnostics believed matter was evil. The spirit was good. Salvation was escape from our evil body through secret knowledge. Christ was not truly human. He just seemed to have a body (Docetism). There were extremes of asceticism and licentiousness.

Early Church Fathers

Origin in about 233 AD mentions the Gospel of Thomas on a list of heretical gospels in his homily on Luke. Eusebius sites the Gospel of Thomas among apocrypha "...which have been adduced under apostolic names by the heretics." Philip of Side round 430 AD, referring to Eusebius, states, "...most of the elders had completely rejected the so-called Gospel of Thomas ....saying that these were the work of heretics."

Conclusions

1. "The author of Gospel of Thomas shows a decided dependence on the canonical Gospels, demonstrating a later date for its composition than the Gospels.
2. In the Gospel of Thomas we see a tendency of the redactor to deliberately make clear traditions into 'hidden' or 'secret' sayings--in keeping with his theology stated at the beginning of his work."
3. "The distinctives of the Coptic version parallels alterations of the Gospel tradition found in later 2nd- through 4th-century documents, including Coptic translations of the Gospels." [JUF:24]
4. "Other distinctives parallel the development of the Diatessaron in the late 2nd century" [JUF:24]
5. "The freedom of citation and interpretation fits the 2nd-century tendency to produce the Christian equivalent to Jewish targum and midrashim" (MJ:1.131) Quotes from Glenn Miller.

Gospels found among the Dead Sea Scrolls?

The gospels are not found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Grant Jeffrey claims that the New Testament is quoted in the Dead Sea Scrolls. He claims there is a fragment of Mark 6:52-53 and several other New Testament verses. He refers to an article in Bible Review (December 1995), but this article is refuting his view. The best scholars who have analyzed the texts do not see any New Testament quotes in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Jeffrey claims that Jesus is mentioned in the scrolls. This is not true. There are prophecies about the messiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls, but no specific mention of Jesus. Most date before Christ was born. The "Pierced Messiah" text, 4Q285 is highly questionable (See BAR 18:4, 80-82). 4Q246 is a Messianic pseudo-Daniel fragment in Aramaic that mentions "son of God" who is extremely war-like (Eisenman & Wise 1992, 68-69). This is hardly a description of Jesus and his ministry.

The Lost Gospel-Ox840?

A fragment of a parchment leaf was discovered in Oxyrhynchos, Egypt in 1905. Some scholars claimed this fragment, Ox840 was part of a lost gospel. The fragment dates to the 4th-5th century, but the text is probably from the 2nd century. The fragment tells of a moral dispute between Jesus and the Jewish High Priest.

This fragment does not seem to be a real gospel of Jesus from the 1st century, but a Christian polemic against the Pharisees of the 2nd century. Here are the key problems with this fragment being a real gospel:

1. In Ox840 the High Priest is a Pharisee, named Levi. In Jesus' time most priests were Sadducees.
2. No High Priest is named Levi in Jesus' time.
3. No source ever mentions a "pool of David."
4. White clothes are put on after purification which is not found in Jewish Literature.
5. There is the presence of pigs.
6. There is a surprising contemplation of holy vessels.
7. A rare word, "place of purification," is used.

Edgar J. Goodspeed concludes that the writer seems to be ignorant of the real conditions in Jerusalem at the time of Christ (JBL 119/4 p.708). Some think Ox840 is a fragment of the Gospel of the Hebrews, or the Gospel of the Egyptians, or the Gospel of the Nazarenes.

Synoptic Gospels and "Q"

The synoptic gospels are Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These gospels are very similar in content. Therefore, scholars hypothesize the "Q" document as the source of the synoptic gospels. "Q" comes from the German word quelle meaning "source" designating the stories common to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but not found in Mark. Some see Mark as the source of Matthew and Luke while others see the Gospel of Matthew as originally written in Aramaic and the source of the other gospels.

At first it was thought that the Gospel of Thomas actually was the Q document, though the general consensus remains that it is not. The scholars think that Q is a written source, whereas Thomas is believed to be derived directly from oral tradition.

Early Church Fathers

Augustine states, "So these four evangelists…are regarded to have written in this order: first Matthew, then Mark, third Luke, and last John."

Jerome writes, "Matthew who is also Levi, ex-publican apostle, composed the Gospel of Christ in Hebrew letters and words first in Judea, on account of those from the circumcision believed; who later translated it in Greek, is not quite certain. Further, the Hebrew itself is still kept today in the Caesarean library" (De Viris Illustribus 3).

It seems that Matthew was originally written in Aramaic then translated into Greek. Both Mark and Luke used Matthew. The similarities and differences are a result of the differences in translation of the Aramaic Matthew by Mark and Luke.

Harmony and comparison of the Four Gospels

Harmony of the Gospels of Jesus in the Bible - shows the Comparisons of the Four Gospels of Jesus Christ in the Bible.

All Four Gospels in the Bible that tell the story of Jesus Christ -- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John -- stand alone, emphasizing a unique aspect of Jesus' life. But when these are blended into one complete account, or Harmonized, we gain new insights about the life of Christ. This Harmony combines the Four Gospels into a single chronological account of Christ's life on earth. It includes every Chapter and Verse of each Gospel, leaving nothing out. The Harmony is divided into 250 events.

Comparison of the Four Gospels

Jesus Is:	MATTHEW Promised King	MARK Servant of God	LUKE Son of Man	JOHN Son of God
ORIGINAL READERS:	Jews	Gentiles, Romans	Greeks	Christians throughout the world
SIGNIFICANT THEMES:	Jesus is the Messiah because He fulfilled Old Testament prophecy	Jesus backed up His words with action	Jesus was God but also fully human	Belief in Jesus is required for Salvation
WRITERS STYLE:	Teacher	Storyteller	Historian	Theologian
GREATEST EMPASSIS:	Jesus' Sermons & Words	Jesus' Miracles & Actions	Jesus' Humanity	The Principles of Jesus' Teaching

	BIRTH-PREPARATION—JESUS	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
1	Luke's purpose in writing			Lk 1:1-4	
2	God became a human being				John 1:1-18
3	The ancestors of Jesus	Matt 1:17		Lk 3:23-38	
4	An Angel promises the birth of John to Zechariah			Lk 1:5-25	
5	An Angel promises the birth of Jesus to Mary			Lk 1:26-38	
6	Mary visits Elizabeth			Lk 1:39-56	
7	John the Baptist is born			Lk 1:57-80	
8	An angel appears to Joseph	Matt 1:18-25			

9	Jesus is born in Bethlehem			Luke 2:1-7	
10	Shepherds visit Jesus			Luke 2:8-20	
11	Mary & Joseph bring Jesus to the temple			Lk 2:21-40	
12	Visitors arrive from eastern lands	Matt 2:1-12			
13	The escape to Egypt	Matt 2:13-18			
14	The return to Nazareth	Matt 2:19-23			
15	Jesus speaks with the religious teachers			Lk 2:41-52	
16	John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus	Matt 3:1-12	Mark 1:1-8	Lk 3:1-18	
17	John baptizes Jesus	Matt 3:13-17	Mark 1:9-11	Lk 3:21-22	
18	Satan tempts Jesus in the desert	Matt 4:1-11	Mark 1:12-13	Lk 4:1-13	
19	John the Baptist declares his mission				Jn 1:19-28
20	John the Baptist proclaims Jesus as the Messiah				Jn 1:29-34
21	The first disciples follow Jesus				Jn 1:35-51
22	Jesus turns water into wine				John 2:1-12

	MESSAGE & MINISTRY—JESUS	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
23	Jesus clears the temple				Jn 2:13-25
24	Nicodemus visits Jesus at night				John 3:1-21
25	John the Baptist tells more about Jesus				Jn 3:22-36

26	Herod puts John in prison			Lk 3:19-20	
27	Jesus talks to a woman at the well				John 4:1-26
28	Jesus tells about the spiritual harvest				Jn 4:27-38
29	Many Samaritans believe in Jesus				Jn 4:39-42
30	Jesus preaches in Galilee	Matt 4:12-17	Mark 1:14-15	Lk 4:14-15	Jn 4:43-45
31	Jesus heals a Government official's son				Jn 4:46-54
32	Jesus is rejected at Nazareth			Lk 4:16-30	
33	Four fishermen follow Jesus	Matt 4:18-22	Mark 1:16-20		
34	Jesus teaches with great Authority		Mark 1:21-28	Lk 4:31-37	
35	Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law & many others	Matt 8:14-17	Mark 1:29-34	Lk 4:38-41	
36	Jesus Preaches throughout Galilee	Matt 4:23-25	Mark 1:35-39	Lk 4:42-44	
37	Jesus provides a Miraculous catch of fish			Luke 5:1-11	
38	Jesus heals a man with Leprosy	Matt 8:1-4	Mark 1:40-45	Lk 5:12-16	
39	Jesus heals a paralyzed man	Matt 9:1-8	Mark 2:1-12	Lk 5:17-26	
40	Jesus eats with Sinners at Matthew's house	Matt 9:9-13	Mark 2:13-17	Lk 5:27-32	
41	Religious leaders ask Jesus about fasting	Matt 9:14-17	Mark 2:18-22	Lk 5:33-39	
42	Jesus heals a lame man by the pool				John 5:1-15
43	Jesus claims to be God's Son				Jn 5:16-30

44	Jesus supports his Claim				Jn 5:31-47
45	Disciples pick wheat on Sabbath	Matt 12:1-8	Mark 2:23-28	Luke 6:1-5	
46	Jesus heals a man's hand on the Sabbath	Matt 12:9-14	Mark 3:1-6	Luke 6:6-11	
47	Large crowds follow Jesus	Mt 12:15-21	Mark 3:7-12		
48	Jesus selects the twelve disciples		Mark 3:13-19	Lke 6:12-16	
49	Jesus gives the Beatitudes	Matt 5:1-12		Lk 6:17-26	
50	Jesus teaches about Salt & Light	Matt 5:13-16			
51	Jesus teaches about the Law	Matt 5:17-20			
52	Jesus teaches about Anger	Matt 5:21-26			
53	Jesus teaches about Lust	Matt 5:27-30			
54	Jesus teaches about Divorce	Matt 5:31,32			
55	Jesus teaches about Vows	Matt 5:33-37			
56	Jesus teaches about retaliation	Matt 5:38-42			
57	Jesus teaches about Loving Enemies	Matt 5:43-48		Lk 6:27-36	
58	Jesus teaches about giving to the Needy	Matt 6:1-4			
59	Jesus teaches about Prayer	Matt 6:5-15			
60	Jesus teaches about Fasting	Matt 6:16-18			
61	Jesus teaches about Money	Matt 6:19-24			
62	Jesus teaches about Worry	Matt 6:25-34			
63	Jesus teaches about Criticizing Others	Matt 7:1-6		Lk 6:37-42	
64	Jesus teaches about Asking, Seeking, Knocking	Matt 7:7-12			
65	Jesus teaches about the way to Heaven	Matt 7:13-14			
66	Jesus teaches about Fruit in	Matt 7:15-20		Lk 6:43-	

	people's lives			45
67	Jesus teaches about building house on Rock vs Sand	Matt 7:21-29		Lk 6:46-49
68	A Roman centurion demonstrates faith	Matt 8:5-13		Lk 7:1-10
69	Jesus raises a widow's son from the dead			Lk 7:11-17
70	Jesus eases John's doubt	Matt 11:1-19		Lk 7:18-35
71	Jesus promises rest for the soul	Matt 11:20-30		
72	A sinful woman anoints Jesus' feet			Lk 7:36-50
73	Women accompany Jesus and the disciples			Luke 8:1-3
74	Pharisees say Jesus is under Satan's power	Matt 12:22-37	Mark 3:20-30	
75	Religious leaders ask Jesus for a miracle	Matt 12:38-45		
76	Jesus describes his true family	Matt 12:46-50	Mark 3:31-35	Lk 8:19-21
77	Jesus tells the parable of the four soils	Matt 13:1-9	Mark 4:1-9	Luke 8:4-8
78	Jesus explains the Parable of the Four Soils	Matt 13:10-23	Mark 4:10-25	Luke 8:9-18
79	Jesus tells the parable of the growing Seed		Mark 4:26-29	
80	Jesus tells the parable of the Weeds	Matt 13:24-30		
81	Jesus tells the parable of the Mustard Seed	Matt 13:31-32	Mark 4:30-34	
82	Jesus tells the Parable of the yeast	Matt 13:33-35		
83	Jesus explains the Parable of the weeds	Matt 13:36-43		
84	Jesus tells the Parable of	Matt 13:44		

	hidden treasure				
85	Jesus tells the Parable of the pearl merchant	Matt 13:45-46			
86	Jesus tells the Parable of the fishing net	Mt 13:47-52			
87	Jesus calms the Storm	Matt 8:23-27	Mark 4:35-41	Lk 8:22-25	
88	Jesus sends the Demons into a herd of Pigs	Matt 8:28-34	Mark 5:1-20	Lk 8:26-39	
89	Jesus heals a bleeding lady & raises girl from dead	Matt 9:18-26	Mark 5:21-43	Lk 8:40-56	
90	Jesus heals the Blind and Mute	Matt 9:27-34			
91	The people of Nazareth refuse to believe	Mt 13:53-58	Mark 6:1-6		
92	Jesus urges the disciples to Pray for workers	Matt 9:35-38			
93	Jesus sends out the 12 Disciples	Matt 10:1-15	Mark 6:7-13	Luke 9:1-6	
94	Jesus prepares the Disciples for persecution	Mt 10:16-42			
95	Herod kills John the Baptist	Matt 14:1-12	Mark 6:14-29	Luke 9:7-9	
96	Jesus feeds Five Thousand	Mt 14:13-21	Mark 6:30-44	Lk 9:10-17	John 6:1-15
97	Jesus walks on Water	Mt 14:22-33	Mark 6:45-52		Jn 6:16-21
98	Jesus heals all who touch him	Mt 14:34-36	Mark 6:53-56		
99	Jesus is the true Bread from Heaven				Jn 6:22-40
100	The Jews disagree that Jesus is from heaven				Jn 6:41-59
101	Many disciples desert Jesus				Jn 6:60-71
102	Jesus teaches about inner purity	Matt 15:1-20	Mark 7:1-23		

103	Jesus sends a demon out of a girl	Mt 15:21-28	Mark 7:24-30	
104	The crowd marvels at Jesus' healings	Mt 15:29-31	Mark 7:31-37	
105	Jesus feeds four thousand	Mt 15:32-39	Mark 8:1-9	
106	Religious leaders ask for a sign in the sky	Matt 16:1-4	Mark 8:10-12	
107	Jesus warns against wrong teaching	Matt 16:5-12	Mark 8:13-21	
108	Jesus restores sight to a blind man		Mark 8:22-26	
109	Peter says Jesus is the Messiah	Matt 16:13-20	Mark 8:27-30	Lk 9:18-20
110	Jesus predicts his death the first time	Matt 16:21-28	Mk 8:31-9:1	Lk 9:21-27
111	Jesus is transfigured on the mountain	Matt 17:1-13	Mark 9:2-13	Lk 9:28-36
112	Jesus heals a demon-possessed boy	Mt 17:14-21	Mark 9:14-29	Lk 9:37-43
113	Jesus predicts his death the second time	Mt 17:22-23	Mark 9:30-32	Lk 9:44-45
114	Peter finds the coin in the fish's mouth	Mt 17:24-27		
115	The disciples argue about who would be Greatest	Mt 18:1-6	Mark 9:33-37	Lk 9:46-48
116	The disciples forbid another to use Jesus' name		Mark 9:38-42	Lk 9:49-50
117	Jesus warns against temptation	Mt 18:7-9	Mark 9:43-50	
118	Jesus warns against looking down on others	Mt 18:10-14		
119	Jesus teaches how to treat a believer who sins	Mt 18:15-20		
120	Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving debtor	Mt 18:21-35		

121	Jesus' brothers ridicule him				John 7:1-9
122	Jesus teaches about the cost of following him	Matt 8:18-22		Lk 9:51-62	
123	Jesus teaches openly at the temple				Jn 7:10-31
124	Religious leaders attempt to arrest Jesus				Jn 7:32-53
125	Jesus forgives an adulterous woman				John 8:1-11
126	Jesus is the light of the world				Jn 8:12-20
127	Jesus warns of coming Judgment				Jn 8:21-29
128	Jesus speaks about God's true children				Jn 8:30-47
129	Jesus states he is eternal				Jn 8:48-59
130	Jesus sends out seventy-two messengers			Lk 10:1-16	
131	The seventy-two messengers return			Lk 10:17-24	
132	Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan			Lk 10:25-37	
133	Jesus visits Mary and Martha			Lk 10:38-42	
134	Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer			Lk 11:1-13	
135	Jesus answers hostile accusations			Lk 11:14-28	
136	Jesus warns against unbelief			Lk 11:29-32	

137	Jesus teaches about the light within	Lk 11:33-36	
138	Jesus criticizes the religious leaders	Lk 11:37-54	
139	Jesus speaks against hypocrisy	Lk 12:1-12	
140	Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool	Lk 12:13-21	
141	Jesus warns about worry	Lk 12:22-34	
142	Jesus warns about preparing for his coming	Lk 12:35-48	
143	Jesus warns about coming division	Lk 12:49-53	
144	Jesus warns about the future crisis	Lk 12:54-59	
145	Jesus calls the people to repent	Lk 13:1-9	
146	Jesus heals the crippled woman	Lk 13:10-17	
147	Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God	Lk 13:18-21	
148	Jesus heals the man who was born blind		John 9:1-12
149	Religious leaders question the blind man		Jn 9:13-34
150	Jesus teaches about spiritual blindness		Jn 9:35-41

151	Jesus is the Good Shepherd		Jn 10:1-21
152	Religious leaders surround Jesus at the temple		Jn 10:22-42
153	Jesus teaches about entering the kingdom	Lk 13:22-30	
154	Jesus grieves over Jerusalem	Lk 13:31-35	
155	Jesus heals a man with dropsy	Lk 14:1-6	
156	Jesus teaches about seeking honour	Lk 14:7-14	
157	Jesus tells the parable of the great feast	Lk 14:15-24	
158	Jesus teaches about the cost of being a disciple	Lk 14:25-35	
159	Jesus parable of the lost sheep	Lk 15:1-7	
160	Jesus tells the parable of the lost coin	Lk 15:8-10	
161	Jesus tells the parable of the lost son	Lk 15:11-32	
162	Jesus tells the parable of the shrewd manager	Lk 16:1-18	
163	Jesus tells about the rich man and the beggar	Lk 16:19-31	
164	Jesus talks on Forgiveness & Faith	Lk 17:1-10	
165	Lazarus becomes ill and dies		John 11:1-16

166	Jesus comforts Mary and Martha				Jn 11:17-36
167	Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead				Jn 11:37-44
168	Religious leaders plot to kill Jesus				Jn 11:45-57
169	Jesus heals ten men with leprosy			Lk 17:11-19	
170	Jesus teaches about the coming Kingdom of God			Lk 17:20-37	
171	Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow			Lk 18:1-8	
172	Jesus tells the parable of two men who prayed			Lk 18:9-14	
173	Jesus teaches about marriage and divorce	Matt 19:1-12	Mk 10:1-12		
174	Jesus blesses little children	Mt 19:13-15	Mk 10:13-16	Lk 18:15-17	
175	Jesus speaks to the Rich Young Man	Mt 19:16-30	Mk 10:17-31	Lk 18:18-30	
176	Jesus tells the parable of the workers paid equally	Matt 20:1-16			
177	Jesus predicts his death the third time	Mt 20:17-19	Mk 10:32-34	Lk 18:31-34	
178	Jesus teaches about serving others	Mt 20:20-28	Mk 10:35-45		
179	Jesus heals a blind beggar	Mt 20:29-34	Mk 10:46-52	Lk 18:35-43	

180	Jesus brings salvation to Zacchaeus			Lk 19:1-10	
181	Jesus tells the parable of the king's ten servants			Lk 19:11-27	
182	A woman anoints Jesus with perfume	Matt 26:6-13	Mark 14:3-9		Jn 12:1-11
183	Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey	Matt 21:1-11	Mark 11:1-11	Lk 19:28-44	Jn 12:12-19
184	Jesus clears the temple again	Mt 21:12-17	Mk 11:12-19	Lk 19:45-48	
185	Jesus explains why he must die				Jn 12:20-36
186	Most of the people do not believe in Jesus				Jn 12:37-43
187	Jesus summarizes his message				Jn 12:44-50
188	Jesus says the disciples can pray for anything	Mt 21:18-22	Mk 11:20-25		
189	Religious leaders challenge Jesus' authority	Mt 21:23-27	Mk 11:26-33	Lk 20:1-8	
190	Jesus tells the parable of the two sons	Mt 21:28-32			
191	Jesus tells the parable of the wicked tenants	Mt 21:33-46	Mark 12:1-12	Lk 20:9-19	
192	Jesus tells the parable of the wedding feast	Mt 22:1-14			
193	Pharisees quest. question Jesus Re: Paying Taxes	Mt 22:15-22	Mk 12:13-17	Lk 20:20-26	
194	Pharisees quest. question Jesus Re: Resurrection	Mt 22:23-33	Mk 12:18-27	Lk 20:27-	

				40	
195	Pharisees quest. Jesus Re: Greatest Command	Mt 22:34-40	Mk 12:28-34		
196	Religious leaders cannot answer Jesus' Question	Mt 22:41-46	Mk 12:35-37	Lk 20:41-44	
197	Jesus warns against the Religious Leaders	Matt 23:1-12	Mk 12:38-40	Lk 20:45-47	
198	Jesus condemns the religious leaders	Mt 23:13-36			
199	Jesus grieves over Jerusalem again	Mt 23:37-39			
200	A poor widow gives all she has		Mk 12:41-44	Lk 21:1-4	
201	Jesus tells about the future	Mt 24:1-22	Mark 13:1-20	Lk 21:5-24	
202	Jesus tells about his return	Mt 24:23-35	Mk 13:21-31	Lk 21:25-33	
203	Jesus tells about remaining watchful	Mt 24:36-51	Mk 13:32-37	Lk 21:34-38	
204	Jesus tells the parable of the ten bridesmaids	Mt 25:1-13			
205	Jesus tells the parable of the loaned money	Mt 25:14-30			
206	Jesus tells about final Judgment	Mt 25:31-46			

	DEATH & RESURRECTION JESUS	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
207	Religious leaders plot to kill Jesus	Matt 26:1-5	Mark 14:1-2	Luke 22:1-2	

208	Judas agrees to betray Jesus	Mt 26:14-16	Mk 14:10-11	Luke 22:3-6	
209	Disciples prepare for the Passover	Mt 26:17-19	Mk 14:12-16	Lk 22:7-13	
210	Jesus washes the disciples' feet				Jn 13:1-20
211	Jesus and the disciples have the Last Supper	Matt 26:20-29	Mk 14:17-25	Lk 22:14-30	Jn 13:21-30
212	Jesus predicts Peter's denial			Lk 22:31-38	Jn 13:31-38
213	Jesus is the way to the Father				Jn 14:1-14
214	Jesus promises the Holy Spirit				Jn 14:15-31
215	Jesus teaches about the vine and the branches				Jn 15:1-16
216	Jesus warns about the world's hatred				John 15:17 John 16:4
217	Jesus teaches about the Holy Spirit				Jn 16:5-16
218	Jesus teaches about using His name in prayer				Jn 16:17-33
219	Jesus prays for Himself				John 17:1-5
220	Jesus prays for His Disciples				Jn 17:6-19
221	Jesus prays for future believers				Jn 17:20-26
222	Jesus again predicts Peter's denial	Mt 26:30-35	Mk 14:26-31		

223	Jesus agonizes in the garden	Mt 26:36-46	Mk 14:32-42	Lk 22:39-46	
224	Jesus is betrayed and arrested	Mt 26:47-56	Mk 14:43-52	Lk 22:47-53	Jn 18:1-11
225	Annas questions Jesus				Jn 18:12-24
226	Caiaphas questions Jesus	Mt 26:57-68	Mk 14:53-65		
227	Peter denies knowing Jesus	Mt 26:69-75	Mk 14:66-72	Lk 22:54-65	Jn 18:25-27
228	The council of religious leaders condemns Jesus	Mt 27:1-2	Mark 15:1	Lk 22:66-71	
229	Judas kills himself	Matt 27:3-10			
230	Jesus stands trial before Pilate	Mt 27:11-14	Mark 15:2-5	Lk 23:1-5	Jn 18:28-38
231	Jesus stands trial before Herod			Lk 23:6-12	
232	Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified	Matt 27:15-2	Mk 15:6-15	Lk 23:13-25	Jn 18:39 Jn 19:16
233	Roman soldiers mock Jesus	Mt 27:27-31	Mk 15:16-20		
234	Jesus is led away to be crucified	Mt 27:32-34	Mk 15:21-24	Lk 23:26-31	John 19:17
235	Jesus is placed on the cross	Mt 27:35-44	Mk 15:25-32	Lk 23:32-43	Jn 19:18-27
236	Jesus dies on the cross	Mt 27:45-56	Mk 15:33-41	Lk 23:44-49	Jn 19:28-37

237	Jesus is laid in the tomb	Mt 27:57-61	Mk 15:42-47	Lk 23:50-56	Jn 19:38-42
238	Guards are posted at the tomb	Mt 27:62-66			
239	Jesus rises from the dead	Matt 28:1-7	Mk 16:1-8	Lk 24:1-12	John 20:1-9
240	Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene		Mk 16:9-11		Jn 20:10-18
241	Jesus appears to the women	Matt 28:8-10			
242	Religious leaders bribe the guards	Mt 28:11-15			
243	Jesus appears to 2 Believers traveling on Road		Mk 16:12-13	Lk 24:13-35	
244	Jesus appears to the disciples behind locked doors			Lk 24:36-43	Jn 20:19-23
245	Jesus appears to the disciples including Thomas		Mk 16:14		Jn 20:24-31
246	Jesus appears to the disciples while fishing				Jn 21:1-14
247	Jesus talks with Peter				Jn 21:15-25
248	Jesus gives the Great Commission	Mt 28:16-20	Mk 16:15-18		
249	Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem			Lk 24:44-49	
250	Jesus ascends into heaven		Mk 16:19-20	Lk 24:50-53	

The Synoptic Gospels

A careful comparison of the four Gospels reveals that Matthew, Mark and Luke are noticeably similar, while John is quite different. The first three Gospels agree extensively in language, in the material they include, and in the order in which events and sayings from the life of Christ are recorded. (Chronological order does not appear to have been rigidly followed in any of the Gospels, however.) Because of this agreement, these three books are called the Synoptic Gospels (*syn*, “together with”; *optic*, “seeing”; thus “seeing together”). For an example of agreement in content see Mt 9:2–8; Mk 2:3–12; Lk 5:18–26. An instance of verbatim agreement is found in Mt 10:22a; Mk 13:13a; Lk 21:17. A mathematical comparison shows that 91 percent of Mark’s gospel is contained in Matthew, while 53 percent of Mark is found in Luke. Such agreement raises questions as to the origin of the Synoptic Gospels. Did the authors rely on a common source? Were they interdependent? Questions such as these constitute what is known as the Synoptic Problem. Several suggested solutions have been advanced:

1.
    1. *The use of oral tradition.* Some have thought that oral tradition had become so stereotyped that it provided a common source from which all the Synoptic writers drew.
    2. *The use of an early Gospel.* Some have postulated that the Synoptic authors all had access to an earlier Gospel, now lost.
    3. *The use of written fragments.* Some have assumed that written fragments had been composed concerning various events from the life of Christ and that these were used by the Synoptic authors.
    4. *Mutual dependence.* Some have suggested that the Synoptic writers drew from each other with the result that what they wrote was often very similar.
    5. *The use of two major sources.* The most common view currently is that the Gospel of Mark and a hypothetical document, called *Quelle* (German for “source”) or *Q*, were used by Matthew and Luke as sources for most of the materials included in their Gospels.
    6. *The priority and use of Matthew.* Another view suggests that the other two Synoptics drew from Matthew as their main source.
    7. *The priority and use of Luke.* A similar view suggests that the other two Synoptics drew from Luke as their main source.
    8. *A combination of the above.* This theory assumes that the authors of the Synoptic Gospels made use of oral tradition, written fragments, mutual dependence on other Synoptic writers or on their Gospels, and the testimony of eyewitnesses.

9. *Complete independence.* Some hold that the Synoptic writers worked independently of each other. According to this view, the similar—sometimes even verbatim—choice and order of words and events are best explained by the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit on the authors.

Prophecies in the Gospels

Amazingly, the complete story of Jesus' life, even in minutest detail, was foretold in the Old Testament, centuries before the events actually happened. It is impossible that 40 different men, from different nations, who spoke different languages, and lived during different times, could all contribute to one Book that perfectly harmonizes in meaning and fulfilled prophecy. It is solid proof of the Divine origin of the Bible as God's Word. Hundreds of modern archeological discoveries have evidenced these facts, thus testifying further to the authenticity of the Bible.

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES OF CHRIST QUOTED IN THE GOSPELS:

1. Christ was to be of king **David's Family** (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 1:69,70; 20:42-44; John 7:42; 2nd Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3-4; 110:1; 132:11; Isaiah 9:6,7; 11:1).
2. Christ was to be **Born of a Virgin** (Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14).
3. Christ was to be **Born in Bethlehem** (Matthew 2:6; John 7:42; Micah 5:2).
4. Christ would **Sojourn in Egypt** (Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1).
5. Christ would **Live in Galilee** (Matthew 4:15; Isaiah 9:1,2)
6. Christ would **Live at Nazareth** (Matthew 2:23; Isaiah 11:1).
7. Christ's **Coming would be Announced** by an Elijah-like Herald (Matthew 3:3; 11:10-14; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-6; 7:27; John 1:23; Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1; 4:5).
8. Christ's Coming would occasion the **Massacre of Bethlehem's Children** (Matthew 2:18; Genesis 35:19-20; 48:7; Jeremiah 31:15).
9. Christ would **Proclaim a Jubilee to the World** (Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 58:6; 61:1).

10. Christ's **Mission would include Gentiles** (Matthew 12:18-21; Isaiah 42:1-4).
11. Christ's **Ministry would be one of Healing** (Matthew 8:17; Isaiah 53:4).
12. Christ would **Teach by Parables** (Matthew 13:14, 15, 35; Isaiah 6:9-10; Psalm 78:2).
13. Christ would be **Disbelieved and Rejected by the Rulers** (Matthew 15:8, 9; 21:42; Mark 7:6, 7; 12:10 11; Luke 20:17; John 12:38-40; 15:25; Psalm 69:4; 118:22; Isaiah 6:10; 29:13; 53:1).
14. Christ would make a **Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem** (Matthew 21:5; John 12:13-15; Isaiah 62:11; Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26).
15. Christ would be like a **Smitten Shepherd** (Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27; Zechariah 13:7).
16. Christ would be **Betrayed by a Friend** for 30 Pieces of Silver (Matthew 27:9-10; John 13:18; Zechariah 11:12-13; Psalm 41:9).
17. All the **Disciples Forsook Him and Fled** (Matthew 26:56; Psalm 38:11; Isaiah 63:3).
18. They would **Cast Lots for Christ's Garments** (Matthew 27:35; John 19:24; Psalm 22:18).
19. Christ's **Hands, Feet and Side would be Pierced** (Matthew; Psalm 22:16; Zechariah 12:10).
20. Christ would be **Given Vinegar and Gall** (Matthew 27:34; John 19:29; Psalm 69:21).
21. Christ's **Bone's would Not be Broken** (John 19:36; Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20).
22. Christ would **Die with Malefactors** (Luke 22:37; Isaiah 53:9, 12).
23. Christ's **Dying Words were Foretold** (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:46; Psalm 22:1; 31:5).
24. Christ would be **Buried by a Rich Man** (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57-60; fact stated, prophecy not quoted)
25. Christ would **Rise from the Dead the Third Day** (Matthew12:40; Luke 24:46). No particular passage is quoted from the Old Testament for this. That Christ would rise from the dead is definitely quoted in Acts 2:25-32, from Psalm 16:10-11. Jesus said it was Written that He would rise the third day (Luke 24:46). Jesus must have had in mind Hosea 6:2 and Jonah 1:7, and Isaac being released from death the third day (Genesis 22:4).

26. Christ’s Rejection would be followed by the **Destruction of Jerusalem and Great Tribulation** for the Jews (Matthew 24:15; mark 13:14; Luke 21:20; Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12: 1, 11).

Jesus Himself realized that in His death He was fulfilling the Scriptures (Matthew 26:54, 56). While He was hanging on the cross, John 19:28 tells us that Jesus was concerned about prophecy being fulfilled… “*After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst*.”

John 19:30 states: “*When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said****, It is finished****: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost*.”

Contrary to what many Bible-scholars teach, Jesus didn’t mean that His work of redemption was FINISHED on the cross. How could it have been? Jesus hadn’t died, been buried, nor raised up from the dead yet. Jesus didn’t mean that at all when He said, “It is finished.”

Jesus meant that all the prophecies concerning His life and Death had been fulfilled up to that point in time… “*After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst… When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said****, It is finished…***”

God is truly amazing, and has given us overwhelming evidence of His Divine Existence and Supreme Power in the fulfilment of Scripture Prophecies.



Nazareth

The Gospel of Matthew (1)

Introduction and Outline

A reminder about what a "gospel" is, a literary work interpreting the theological meaning of a concrete historical event to particular people in a particular historical situation.

Although tradition and our Bibles attribute this gospel to "Matthew", the reality is, we don't know who wrote it. Many scholars think the gospel was written by a second generation Christian, using" Mark" and "Q" (a collection of sayings of Jesus) along with the writers own sources. The Gospel was probably written around 85 CE (dates range from 80-90). The Gospel of Matthew was known by Ignatius of Antioch (110 CE).

Historical Context:

Scholars are not exactly sure where or for whom the Gospel was written but most think in was written in an urban Greco-Roman location. Antioch, Syria is the most commonly mentioned site.

Antioch was a large city, perhaps third largest in Roman empire. It was the capital of the Roman province of Syria and was a commercial center. At the end of first century it's population was estimated to be between 150,00 to 200, 000. All these people lived in a small space. Scholars think there were about 205 people per acre in Antioch. By comparison, Bombay has about 183 people/acre and Calcutta about 122.

There were 3-4 Roman Legions, or about 15-20 thousand soldiers stationed in Antioch. Antioch was a staging ground for the 66-70 war. In that war, Jerusalem was occupied and the Temple was destroyed.

There was a significant Jewish population in Antioch. There were at least two synagogues and also a community center which had political, social, and educational functions. Like elsewhere, the Jewish community was diverse and multifaceted. After the destruction of the Temple and the loss of their land, a way of life and religious practice had ended. The Jewish community was in a state of flux, trying to discover their way forward.

Matthew's Gospel was written for use in a particular community. Not for "outsiders" and not with an evangelistic purpose in mind. Scholars think the community reflected a cross section of Antioch's urban society, mostly Jewish with some Gentiles. At this point in history, Christian Jews and non Christian Jews were becoming estranged. While Christian Jews thought their faith was consistent with Judaism, other Jews disagreed. Christian Jews were being ostracized from their community and from the synagogue. This has political, social, economic and familial implications. Christianity is at a crossroad, trying to be faithful and trying find their identity which, while growing out of Judaism, is no longer Jewish but is also (and never had been) pagan, even though pagan gentiles were joining the faith.

Scholars believe Matthew was writing to a small community. Estimates ranger from 19 to 150 to 1000. No matter what the number, there were a small group in a city of 150-200,000. The community Matthew is written for is a small group living in a tough urban setting which had to navigate life under Roman Imperial power and it is dispute with the local synagogue over its place (or lack thereof) in the Jewish community. This small community doesn't "fit" well in any of the cultural, social, and political options available to it.

Main Themes:

Conflict is central to the plot. The cosmic conflict between God and satan and the conflict on earth between Jesus and demons, forces of nature, illness, the religious leaders and the disciples.

Identity shaping for life as marginal community of disciples. Matthew's Gospel is a counter-narrative standing over against Roman Imperial power and Jewish religious authorities. Matthew offers another world view and way of life. The author encourages and challenges the reader to live a counter-cultural life.

Persons who are marginal in the Roman world are those who are most aligned with God's plan. God's empire comes from the margins to challenge the powerful status quo.

Formational rather than informational_ The Gospel is not simple concerned with delivering information, nor is it evangelistic. It is concerned with those who are already disciples, encouraging, confirming, strengthening their faith.

Literary Composition

There are two (main) ways scholars think about Matthew's composition.

The narrative develops in three major sections:

The Identity of Jesus (1:1-4:16)

The Ministry of Jesus (4:17-16:20)

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus (16:21-28:20)

Within this narrative, the author also has organized the material into five discourses by Jesus, each representing a major theme. In between the discourses the acts of Jesus are told. Some believe the five discourses are an echo of the five books of Torah.

The Sermon on the Mount (chapter 5-7)

The Missionary Discourse (chapter 10)

The Parable Discourse (chapter 13)

The Community Discourse (chapter 18)

The Eschatological Discourse (chapters 24-25)

An Outline of the Gospel of Matthew

I. The Identity of Jesus: God Commissions Jesus 1:1-4:16

A 1:1-17 Genealogy

B 1:18-2:23 Infancy Narrative

1:18-25 Jesus' Conception and Commission

2:1-12 Visit of the Magi

2:13-23 Murderous Herod and Faithful Joseph and Mary

C. Preparation for Ministry 3:1-4:16

3:1- 12 John the Baptist

3:13-17 Baptism of Jesus

4:1-11 The Devil's Temptation of Jesus

4:12-16 Galilee of the Gentiles: Jesus the Light Shines in Imperial Darkness

II. Jesus' Ministry to Israel: Jesus Manifests God's Empire and Commission in Words and Actions 4:17-11:1

A. Jesus Begins His Ministry: How Jesus Carries out His Mission 4:17-25

4:17 The Message of Jesus

4:18-22 Call of Disciples

4:23-25 Summary

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The traditional site of Jesus' birth, in a cave below the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem



Also below the Church in a cave were daily the Holy Eucharist of the Nativity is daily celebrated

Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (2)

by

J.C. Ryle

(Public domain)

Chapter 1

MATTHEW 1:1-17

1. **The genealogy and birth of the King**

Verses 1-17. His royal descent

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac. Isaac became the father of Jacob. Jacob became the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron. Hezron became the father of Ram. Ram became the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon. Nahshon became the father of Salmon. Salmon became the father of Boaz by Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed by Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse. Jesse became the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam became the father of Abijah. Abijah became the father of Asa. Asa became the father of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat became the father of Joram. Joram became the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham. Jotham became the father of Ahaz. Ahaz became the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh. Manasseh became the father of Amon. Amon became the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel became the father of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel became the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim. Eliakim became the father of Azor. Azor became the father of Sadoc. Sadoc became the father of Achim. Achim became the father of Eliud. Eliud became the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan. Matthan became the father of Jacob. Jacob became the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the exile to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the carrying away to Babylon to the Christ, fourteen generations.

These verses begin the New Testament. Let us always read them with serious and solemn feelings. The book before us contains not the word of men, but of God. Every verse in it was written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Let us thank God daily for giving us the Scriptures. The poorest Englishman who understands his Bible, knows more about religion than the wisest philosophers of Greece and Rome.

Let us remember our deep responsibility. We shall all be judged at the last day according to our light. To whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required.

Let us read our Bibles reverently and diligently, with an honest determination to believe and practice all we find in them. It is no light matter how we use this book. Eternal life or death depends on the spirit in which it is used.

Above all let us humbly pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. He alone can apply truth to our hearts, and make us profit by what we read.

The New Testament begins with the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. No part of the Bible is so important as this, and no part is so full and complete. Four distinct Gospels tell us the story of Christ's doing and dying. Four times over we read the precious account of His works and words. How thankful we ought to be for this! To know Christ is life eternal. To believe in Christ is to have peace with God. To follow Christ is to be a true Christian. To be with Christ will be heaven itself. We can never hear too much about Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a long list of names. Sixteen verses are taken up with tracing a pedigree from Abraham to David, and from David to the family in which Jesus was born. Let no one think that these verses are useless. Nothing is useless in creation. The least mosses, and the smallest insects, serve some good end. Nothing is useless in the Bible. Every word of it is inspired. The chapters and verses which seem at first sight unprofitable, are all given for some good purpose. Look again at these sixteen verses, and you will see in them useful and instructive lessons.

Learn from this list of names, that God always keeps His word. He had promised, that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. He had promised to raise up a Saviour of the family of David. (Gen. 12:3; Isaiah 11:1.) These sixteen verses prove, that Jesus was the son of David and the son of Abraham, and that God's promise was fulfilled. Thoughtless and ungodly people

should remember this lesson, and be afraid. Whatever they may think, God will keep His word. If they repent not, they will surely perish. True Christians should remember this lesson, and take comfort. Their Father in heaven will be true to all His engagements. He has said, that He will save all believers in Christ. If He has said it, He will certainly do it. "He is not a man that He should lie." "He remains faithful--He cannot deny Himself." (2 Tim. 2:13.)

Learn next from this list of names, the sinfulness and corruption of human nature. Observe how many godly parents in this catalogue had wicked and ungodly sons. The names of Rehoboam, and Joram, and Amon, and Jechoniah, should teach us humbling lessons. They had all pious fathers. But they were all wicked men. Grace does not run in families. It needs something more than good examples and good advice to make us children of God. Those who are born again are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, (John 1:13.) Praying parents should pray night and day, that their children may be born of the Spirit.

Learn lastly from this list of names, how great is the mercy and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Think how defiled and unclean our nature is; and then think what a condescension it was in Him to be born of a woman, and "made in the likeness of men." Some of the names we read in this catalogue remind us of shameful and sad histories. Some of the names are those of people never mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. But at the end of all comes the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though He is the eternal God, He humbled Himself to become man, in order to provide salvation for sinners. "Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor."

We should always read this catalogue with thankful feelings. We see here that no one who partakes of human nature can be beyond the reach of Christ's sympathy and compassion. Our sins may have been as black and great as those of any whom Matthew names. But they cannot shut us out of heaven, if we repent and believe the gospel. If Jesus was not ashamed to be born of a woman, whose pedigree contained such names as those we have read today, we need not think that He will be ashamed to call us brethren, and to give us eternal life.

MATTHEW 1:18-25

Verses 18-25. His virgin birth

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was like this; for after his mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant by the

Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly. But when he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take to yourself Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She shall bring forth a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins."

Now all this has happened, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son. They shall call his name Immanuel;" which is, being interpreted, "God with us."

Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took his wife to himself; and didn't know her sexually until she had brought forth her firstborn son. He named him Jesus.

These verses begin by telling us two great truths. They tell us how the Lord Jesus Christ took our nature upon Him, and became man. They tell us also that His birth was miraculous. His mother Mary was a virgin.

These are very mysterious subjects. They are depths, which we have no line to fathom. They are truths, which we have not mind enough to comprehend. Let us not attempt to explain things which are above our feeble reason. Let us be content to believe with reverence, and not speculate about matters which we cannot understand. Enough for us to know, that with Him who made the world nothing is impossible. Let us rest in the words of the Apostles' Creed: "Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary."

Let us observe the conduct of Joseph described in these verses. It is a beautiful example of godly wisdom, and tender consideration for others. He saw the "appearance of evil" in her who was his espoused wife. But he did nothing rashly. He waited patiently to have the line of duty made clear. In all probability he laid the matter before God in prayer. "He who believes shall not be in haste." (Isaiah 28:16.)

The patience of Joseph was graciously rewarded. He received a direct message from God upon the subject of his anxiety, and was at once relieved from all his fears. How good it is to wait upon God! Who ever cast his cares upon God in hearty prayer, and found him fail? "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." (Prov. 3:6.)

Let us observe the two names given to our Lord in these verses. One is JESUS: the other EMMANUEL. One describes His office; the other His nature. Both are deeply interesting.

The name JESUS means "Saviour." It is the same name as Joshua in the Old Testament. It is given to our Lord because "He saves His people from their sins." This is His special office. He saves them from the guilt of sin, by washing them in His own atoning blood. He saves them from the dominion of sin, by putting in their hearts the sanctifying Spirit. He saves them from the presence of sin, when He takes them out of this world to rest with Him. He will save them from all the consequences of sin, when He shall give them a glorious body at the last day. Blessed and holy are Christ's people! From sorrow, cross, and conflict they are not saved. But they are saved from sin for evermore. They are cleansed from guilt by Christ's blood. They are made fit for heaven by Christ's Spirit. This is salvation. He who cleaves to sin is not yet saved.

Jesus is a very encouraging name to heavy-laden sinners. He who is King of kings and Lord of lords might lawfully have taken some more high-sounding title. But He does not do so. The rulers of this world have often called themselves Great, Conquerors, Bold, Magnificent, and the like. The Son of God is content to call Himself Saviour. The souls which desire salvation may draw near to the Father with boldness, and have access with confidence through Christ. It is His office and His delight to show mercy. "For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him." (John 3:17.)

Jesus is a name, which is peculiarly sweet and precious to believers. It has often done them good, when the favour of kings and princes would have been heard of with unconcern. It has given them what money cannot buy, even inward peace. It has eased their wearied consciences, and given rest to their heavy hearts. The Song of Solomon speaks the experience of many, when it says, "your name is oil poured forth." (Cant. 1:3.) Happy is that person, who trusts not merely in vague notions of God's mercy and goodness, but in "Jesus."

The other name in these verses is scarcely less interesting than that just referred to. It is the name which is given to our Lord from his nature, as "God manifest in the flesh." He is called EMMANUEL, "God with us."

Let us take care that we have clear views of our Lord Jesus Christ's nature and person. It is a point of the deepest importance. We should settle it firmly in our minds, that our Saviour is perfect man as well as perfect God, and perfect God as well as perfect man. If we once lose sight of this great foundation truth,

we may run into fearful heresies. The name Emmanuel takes in the whole mystery. Jesus is "God with us." He had a nature like our own in all things, sin only excepted. But though Jesus was "with us" in human flesh and blood, He was at the same time very God.

We shall often find, as we read the Gospels, that our Savior could be weary, and hungry, and thirsty--could weep, and groan, and feel pain like one of ourselves. In all this we see "the man" Christ Jesus. We see the nature He took on Him, when He was born of the Virgin Mary.

But we shall also find in the same Gospels that our Savior knew men's hearts and thoughts--that He had power over devils--that He could work the mightiest of miracles with a word--that He was ministered to by angels--that He allowed a disciple to call Him "my God,"--and that he said, "Before Abraham was I am," and "I and my Father are one." In all this we see "the eternal God." We see Him "who is over all, God, blessed forever. Amen." (Rom. 9:5.)

Would you have a strong foundation for your faith and hope? Then keep in constant view your Saviour’s divinity. He in whose blood you are taught to trust is the Almighty God. All power is His in heaven and earth. None can pluck you out of His hand. If you are a true believer in Jesus, let not your heart be troubled or afraid.

Would you have sweet comfort in suffering and trial? Then keep in constant view your Saviour’s humanity. He is the man Christ Jesus, who lay on the bosom of the Virgin Mary, as a little infant, and knows the heart of a man. He can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities. He has Himself experienced Satan's temptations. He has endured hunger. He has shed tears. He has felt pain. Trust Him at all times with all your sorrows. He will not despise you. Pour out all your heart before Him in prayer, and keep nothing back. He can sympathize with His people.

Let these thoughts sink down into our minds. Let us bless God for the encouraging truths which the first chapter of the New Testament contains. It tells us of One who "saves His people from their sins." But this is not all. It tells us that this Saviour is "Emmanuel," God Himself, and yet God with us, God manifest in human flesh like our own. This is glad tidings. This is indeed good news. Let us feed on these truths in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.



The Star of Bethlehem

The Bible says nothing about the calendar date of the Nativity, but does refer to historical personages and events, such as the reign of King Herod. Modern historical research suggests that Herod may have died sometime between 4 B.C. and 1 B.C. by our present calendar. The Magi are said to have visited Herod just before he died and presumably the birth of Christ and the first appearance of the fabled Star came sometime before that.

And it is very doubtful that Jesus was born in late December.

As to the date for the birth of the Messiah, the December 25, is not very much biblical, and the date for the divine birth has no foundation at all. Rather, is Christmas a pagan feast, witchcraft having the Winter Solstice around December 21.

For one thing, the oft-quoted Biblical passage in Luke: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" indicates that spring is the likely season; that was when the shepherds in Judea were tending the newborn lambs.

In ancient times, December 25 was the date of the lavish Roman festival of Saturnalia. It was a time when gifts were exchanged; homes, streets and buildings were decorated; people came home for the holidays and everybody

was in a happy, party mood.

It has been said that early Christians chose the date of the Saturnalia in order to avoid attention and thus escape persecution. When the Roman emperor Constantine officially adopted Christianity in the 4th century, the date of Christmas remained December 25.

And Christ's birth almost certainly did not occur 2,011 years ago. Our present chronology by which the years are numbered as AD or BC was conceived by the Roman abbot Dionysius Exiguus around 523 A.D. Unfortunately, Dionysius made two significant errors in his calculations.

The first was his placement of 1 A.D. immediately following 1 B.C., completely disregarding the mathematically required 0 in between. Back then in Europe, zero was not considered a number. So, for instance, the year we now call 3 B.C., is actually –2 numerically speaking.

Second, Dionysius accepted the statement of Clement of Alexandria that Jesus was born in the 28th year of the reign of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus. But Dionysius failed to realize that during the first four years of his reign this Roman ruler was known by his original name Octavianus, until the Roman senate proclaimed him as "Augustus."

So here alone we have an error of four years, but by the time it was realized our chronology was too well entrenched to be changed.

As for the time for the appearance of the Star, most astronomers and Biblical scholars believe that it most likely occurred sometime between the years 7 and 2 B.C. So this is the time frame that we need to explore to determine if there was anything unusual in the sky that might have caught the attention of the Magi.

What might the star have been?

At least four theories have been advanced to explain the Star of Bethlehem from a purely astronomical viewpoint.

Possibly the first idea put forward was that it was an unusually bright fireball meteor seen streaking toward the horizon. But as any sky watcher knows from experience, such an object can be seen to flash across the sky in a mere matter of seconds – hardly long enough to lead the Magi halfway across the Orient to the little town of Bethlehem. So we can confidently lay this concept to rest.

Not so easily dismissed, however, is the possibility that the Star was a bright comet. Such objects can remain visible to the unaided eye for weeks either in the predawn sky or at dusk. Surely it is not impossible to conceive that a comet with a bright star-like head and long gossamer tail pointing like some cosmic finger toward the horizon could have drawn the Magi to Bethlehem.

The famous Halley's Comet, last seen in early 1986, flared in the sky during August and September in the year 11 BC. However, most authorities dismiss it due to the poor time fit. Although it seems unlikely that another Great Comet could have appeared nearer to the accepted time frame of the Star's appearance and went unrecorded, we can never really be sure.

Besides, comets were viewed as omens of evil, such as floods and famine as well as the death – not the birth – of kings and monarchs. The Romans, in marking the death of the Roman General Agrippa, for example, used the 11 B.C. apparition of Halley's Comet as a benchmark. With this in mind, comets would seem to be wrong as the heavenly sign that would signal the coming of a newborn king.

Perhaps the simplest answer is a nova or supernova outburst: A new star blazes forth where none had ever been seen and leaves no trace for us to find in the future. Although their names imply a new creation, these spectacular objects are in reality dying stars, although they are new (albeit temporary) additions to the nighttime sky.

The appearance of a nova is unpredictable – a really bright one becomes visible perhaps once every 20 years or so. Going on this assumption, we're due for a bright naked-eye nova at almost any time now, since the most recent one appeared in August 1975 not far from the bright star Deneb in the constellation Cygnus.

Most bright novas suddenly and unexpectedly flare into prominence literally overnight, attracting the instant attention of sky-conscious people. But after several days or weeks of such prominence, it gradually fades back to obscurity.

Even more spectacular – but much rarer – are supernovae; stars that suddenly blow themselves completely apart, briefly producing an incredible energy output equivalent to the combined light of an entire galaxy of stars!

At the height of its outburst, a supernova can shine with a brilliance capable of casting shadows and can even be seen in broad daylight – truly a celestial announcement worthy of the birth of a king. In our Milky Way galaxy, over the

past thousand years, there have been four brilliant supernovas, in 1006, 1054, 1572 and 1604.

Clearly, we are long overdue for another.

Although a nova or supernova is the most satisfying explanation for the Star, there is a serious problem with it, in that there doesn't seem to be any definitive record of a bright nova appearing in the sky during the time that biblical historians believe the Magi made their journey. One nova apparently did appear, bordering the constellations Capricornus and Aquarius during the spring of 5 B.C. But the Chinese records, which describe this object, imply that it was apparently not very conspicuous at all.

Planet peregrinations?

The final possibility is one or more of the bright naked-eye planets. The likelihood that the Magi could have confused one or more of the familiar planets with a star seems remote. However, sometimes two or more of these restless wanderers come together in a striking conjunction.

Perhaps a planetary grouping of particular beauty; an exceptionally close conjunction of two planets or groupings of three or more creating an eye-catching geometric figure in the sky may have taken place between the years 7 and 2 B.C. Such a gathering would be quite unusual to say the least.

One such event that we've already mentioned occurred in 6 B.C. involving Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, and happened in the constellation of Pisces, the Fishes.

Yet another possible explanation for the Star of Bethlehem is the three-times passing of Jupiter and Saturn between May and December in 7 BC; a rare triple or "great conjunction." Jupiter appeared to pass one degree north of Saturn on May 29; practically the same on Sept. 30; then finally a third time on Dec. 5.

There is no doubt about the visibility of these events, mostly opposite to the sun in nighttime skies. As for their astrological impact, the Magi would have certainly noticed that both planets did not appear to separate widely between their conjunctions. In fact, for eight consecutive months – the time it might have taken to travel the 500 miles or more from Babylonia to Judea – Jupiter and Saturn remained within three degrees of each other, from late April of 7 B.C. until early January of 6 B.C.

But perhaps no other planetary grouping can equal that of the two brightest planets – Venus and Jupiter – for the explanation that we seek. And if we take the only known account of the Star given in St. Matthew, then what we really need is the appearance of not just one, but two "stars." The first appearance would have been seen well in advance of the Magi's arrival in Bethlehem, and the other at the end of their long journey.

Maybe the signal for their star was to be a sign in the constellation of Leo, the Lion.

To the early Israelites, Leo was a constellation of great astrological significance and considered a sacred part of the sky. A very close conjunction of Venus and Jupiter would have been visible in the eastern dawn sky of the Middle East on August 12, 3 B.C.

When they first emerged above the eastern horizon, the two planets were separated by only about two-fifths of the moon's apparent diameter or 12 minutes of arc. As a comparison, the separation of the stars Mizar and Alcor in the handle of the Big Dipper is also 12 arc minutes.

Planets this close can be very striking, if they don't differ too much in brightness. Incidentally, this sign would have been both seen "in the east" by Persian men "in the East," explaining the ambiguous phrase in St. Matthew.

Venus ultimately vanished into the glare of the sun, but Jupiter and Leo remained in the night sky during the next ten months. During this time a number of additional planetary conjunctions took place, all of which would have been of great importance to the priest-astrologers of the time.

Sometime during the spring of 2 B.C. the Magi might have had their audience with King Herod, who questioned them diligently as to what they had seen and when. Obviously Herod and his advisers missed out on seeing the "star" for themselves (but then again, it appeared at around 4 or 5 a.m. when likely the only thing they were watching were the inside of their eyelids!). Herod sent the Magi on their way to search for the Christ child.

Then, during June of 2 B.C., as Jupiter and the stars of Leo began to sink into the western evening twilight, Venus again returned to this same region of the sky for an even more spectacular encore. The Magi certainly would have especially taken note that on the evening of June 17, Jupiter and Venus appeared even closer together than they did in the dawn skies of the previous August. As the planets slowly descended toward the horizon they got closer and closer together. Finally, at 8:30 p.m. local time they drew to within a mere 0.6

of an arc minute of each other while appearing in the western twilight sky.

To the Magi the two brightest planets must have appeared to coalesce into one and glowed before them like a dazzling beacon over Judea. Eyeglasses were many centuries in the future, so only people with perfect eyes would have seen the planets separated.

Astronomy can tell us that all these planetary conjunctions indeed occurred. But whether anyone actually observed them, and if any of these sent the Magi on their historic journey, are all matters for conjecture.

A supernatural occurrence?

And finally, was the Star of Bethlehem a miracle star?

Hubert J. Bernhard, who for many years was a lecturer at San Francisco's Morrison Planetarium made a series of four LP record albums in 1967, trying to educate and popularize astronomy. They were called "The Planetarium Lecture Series" and one of his topics dealt with the Star of Bethlehem. Near the end of his lecture Bernhard placed this discussion into perspective when he said:

"If you accept the story told in the Bible as the literal truth, then the Christmas Star could not have been a natural apparition. Its movement in the sky and its ability to stand above and mark a single building; these would indicate that it was not a normal phenomenon, but a supernatural sign. One given from on high and one that science will never be able to explain."

Indeed, perhaps this is a mystery that modern science can never truly unravel. Astronomy has taken us as far as it can go. The final decision is yours, alone.

Chapter 2

2. The infancy of the King

MATTHEW 2:1-12

Verses 1-12. The visit of the magi

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem

with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ would be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written through the prophet, 'You Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah: for out of you shall come forth a governor, who shall shepherd my people, Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called the wise men, and learned from them exactly what time the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child. When you have found him, bring me word, so that I also may come and worship him."

They, having heard the king, went their way; and behold, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. They came into the house and saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Opening their treasures, they offered to him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Being warned in a dream that they shouldn't return to Herod, they went back to their own country another way.

It is not known who these wise men were. Their names and dwelling-place are alike kept back from us. We are only told that they came "from the East." Whether they were Chaldeans or Arabians we cannot say. Whether they learned to expect Christ from the ten tribes who went into captivity, or from the prophecies of Daniel, we do not know. It matters little who they were. The point which concerns us most is the rich instruction which their history conveys.

These verses show us, that there may be true servants of God in places where we should not expect to find them. The Lord Jesus has many "hidden ones" like these wise men. Their history on earth may be as little known as that of Melchizedek, and Jethro, and Job. But their names are in the book of life, and they will be found with Christ in the day of His appearing. It is well to remember this. We must not look round the earth and say hastily, "all is barren." The grace of God is not tied to places and families. The Holy Spirit can lead souls to Christ without the help of many outward means. Men may be born in dark places of the earth, like these wise men, and yet like them be made "wise unto salvation." There are some travelling to heaven at this moment, of whom the church and the world know nothing. They flourish in secret places like the lily among thorns, and "waste their sweetness on the desert air." But Christ loves them, and they love Christ.

These verses teach us, that it is not always those who have most religious privileges, who give Christ most honour. We might have thought that the

Scribes and Pharisees would have been the first to hasten to Bethlehem, on the lightest rumour that the Saviour was born. But it was not so. A few unknown strangers from a distant land were the first, except the shepherds mentioned by Luke, to rejoice at His birth. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." What a mournful picture this is of human nature! How often the same kind of thing may be seen among ourselves! How often the very people who live nearest to the means of grace are those who neglect them most! There is only too much truth in the old proverb, "The nearer the church the further from God." Familiarity with sacred things has a dreadful tendency to make men despise them. There are many, who from residence and convenience ought to be first and foremost in the worship of God, and yet are always last. There are many, who might well be expected to be last, who are always first.

These verses teach us, that there may be knowledge of Scripture in the head, while there is no grace in the heart. Mark how king Herod sends to inquire of the priests and elders "where the Christ would be born." Mark what a ready answer they return him, and what an acquaintance with the letter of Scripture they show. But they never went to Bethlehem to seek for the coming Savior. They would not believe in Him, when He ministered among them. Their heads were better than their hearts. Let us all beware of resting satisfied with head-knowledge. It is an excellent thing, when rightly used. But a man may have much of it, and yet perish everlastingly. What is the state of our hearts? This is the great question. A little grace is better than many gifts. Gifts alone save no one. But grace leads on to glory.

The conduct of the wise men described in this chapter is a splendid example of spiritual diligence. What trouble it must have cost them to travel from their homes to the place where Jesus was born! How many weary miles they must have journeyed! The fatigues of an Eastern traveler are far greater than we in England can at all understand. The time that such a journey would occupy must necessarily have been very great. The dangers to be encountered were neither few nor small. But none of these things moved them. They had set their hearts on seeing Him "who was born King of the Jews;" and they never rested until they saw Him. They prove to us the truth of the old saying, "Where there is a will there is a way."

It would be well for all professing Christians if they were more ready to follow the wise men's example. Where is our self-denial? What pains do we take about our souls? What diligence do we show about following Christ? What does our religion cost us? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration.

Last, but not least, the conduct of the wise men is a striking example of faith. They believed in Christ when they had never seen Him--but that was not all. They believed in Him when the Scribes and Pharisees were unbelieving--but that again was not all. They believed in Him when they saw Him a little infant on Mary's knee, and worshiped Him as a king. This was the crowning point of their faith. They saw no miracles to convince them. They heard no teaching to persuade them. They beheld no signs of divinity and greatness to overawe them. They saw nothing but a new-born infant, helpless and weak, and needing a mother's care like any one of ourselves. And yet when they saw that infant, they believed that they saw the divine Saviour of the world. "They fell down and worshiped Him."

We read of no greater faith than this in the whole volume of the Bible. It is a faith that deserves to be placed side by side with that of the penitent thief. The thief saw one dying the death of a malefactor, and yet prayed to Him, and "called Him Lord." The wise men saw a new-born babe on the lap of a poor woman, and yet worshiped Him and confessed that He was Christ. Blessed indeed are those that can believe in this fashion!

This is the kind of faith, let us remember, that God delights to honor. We see the proof of that at this very day. Wherever the Bible is read the conduct of these wise men is known, and told as a memorial of them. Let us walk in the steps of their faith. Let us not be ashamed to believe in Jesus and confess Him, though all around us remain careless and unbelieving. Have we not a thousand-fold more evidence than the wise men had, to make us believe that Jesus is the Christ? Beyond doubt we have. Yet where is our faith?

MATTHEW 2:13-23

Verses 13-23. Flight into Egypt

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."

He arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked by the wise men, was exceedingly angry, and sent out, and killed all the male children who were in

Bethlehem and in all the surrounding countryside, from two years old and under, according to the exact time which he had learned from the wise men. Then that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; she wouldn't be comforted, because they are no more."

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel, for those who sought the young child's life are dead."

He arose and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there. Being warned in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee, and came and lived in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Observe in this passage, how true it is that the rulers of this world are seldom friendly to the cause of God. The Lord Jesus comes down from heaven to save sinners, and at once we are told that Herod the king "sought to destroy him."

Greatness and riches are a perilous possession for the soul. They know not what they seek who seek to have them. They lead men into many temptations. They are likely to fill the heart with pride, and to chain the affections down to things below. "Not many mighty, not many noble are called." "A rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty."

Do you envy the rich and great? Does your heart say, "Oh I that I had their place, and rank, and substance?" Beware of giving way to the feeling. The very wealth which you admire may be gradually sinking its possessor down into hell. A little more money might be your ruin. Like Herod you might run into every excess of wickedness and cruelty. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." "Be content with such things as you have."

Do you think that Christ's cause depends on the power and patronage of princes? You are mistaken. They have seldom done much for the advancement of true religion. They have far more frequently been the enemies of the truth. "Put not your trust in princes." Those who are like Herod are many. Those who are like Josiah and Edward the Sixth of England are few.

Observe how the Lord Jesus was "a man of sorrows" even from His infancy. Trouble awaits Him as soon as He enters into the world. His life is in danger from Herod's hatred. His mother and Joseph are obliged to take Him away by night, and "flee into Egypt." It was only a type and figure of all His experience upon earth. The waves of humiliation began to beat over Him, even when He was a nursing child.

The Lord Jesus is just the Savior that the suffering and sorrowful need. He knows well what we mean, when we tell Him in prayer of our troubles. He can sympathize with us, when we cry to Him under cruel persecution. Let us keep nothing back from Him. Let us make Him our bosom friend. Let us pour out our hearts before Him. He has had great experience of affliction.

Observe how death can remove the kings of this world like other men. The rulers of millions have no power to retain life, when the hour of their departure comes. The murderer of helpless infants must himself die. Joseph and Mary hear the tidings that "Herod is dead;" and at once they return in safety to their own land.

True Christians should never be greatly moved by the persecution of man. Their enemies may be strong, and they may be weak; but still they ought not to be afraid. They should remember that "the triumphing of the wicked is but short." What has become of the Pharaohs and Neros and Diocletians, who at one time fiercely persecuted the people of God? Where is the enmity of Charles the Ninth of France, and Bloody Mary of England? They did their utmost to cast the truth down to the ground. But the truth rose again from the earth, and still lives; and they are dead, and mouldering in the grave. Let not the heart of any believer fail. Death is a mighty leveler, and can take any mountain out of the way of Christ's church. "The Lord lives" forever. His enemies are only men. The truth shall always prevail.

Observe, in the last place, what a lesson of humility is taught us by the dwelling place of the Son of God, when He was on earth. He dwelt with His mother and Joseph "in a city called Nazareth." Nazareth was a small town in Galilee. It was an obscure, retired place, not so much as once mentioned in the Old Testament. Hebron, and Shiloh, and Gibeon, and Bethel, were far more important places. But the Lord Jesus passed by them all, and chose Nazareth. This was humility.

In Nazareth the Lord Jesus lived thirty years. It was there He grew up from infancy to childhood, and from childhood to boyhood, and from boyhood to youth, and from youth to man's estate. We know little of the manner in which

those thirty years were spent. That He was "subject to Mary and Joseph," we are expressly told. That He worked in the carpenter's shop with Joseph, is highly probable. We only know, that almost five sixths of the time that the Savior of the world was on earth was passed among the poor of this world, and passed in complete retirement. Truly this was humility.

Let us learn wisdom from our Savior's example. We are far too ready to "seek great things" in this world. Let us seek them not. To have a place, and a title, and a position in society, is not nearly so important as people think. It is a great sin to be covetous, and worldly, and proud, and carnal-minded. But it is no sin to be poor. It matters not so much where we live, as what we are in the sight of God. Where are we going when we die? Shall we live forever in heaven? These are the main things to which we should attend.

Above all, let us daily strive to copy our Savior's humility. Pride is the oldest and commonest of sins. Humility is the rarest and most beautiful of graces. For humility let us labor. For humility let us pray. Our knowledge may be scanty. Our faith may be weak. Our strength may be small. But if we are disciples of Him who "lived in Nazareth," let us at any rate be humble.



Touring in Israel is an occasion to go to Yardenit, and through baptism by immersion confirming your yielding faith in Jesus Christ, maybe once again

Chapter 3

MATTHEW 3:1-12

3. The King’s herald and baptism

Verses 1-12. The King’s herald

In those days, John the Baptizer came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" For this is he who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight."

Now John himself wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. Then people from Jerusalem, all of Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him. They were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit worthy of repentance! Don't think to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. "Even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't bring forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you in water for repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire."

These verses describe the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a ministry that deserves close attention. Few preachers ever produced such effects. "There went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan." None ever received such praise from the great Head of the Church. Jesus calls him "a burning and a shining light." The great Bishop of souls Himself declares, that "among those who are born of women there has not arisen one greater than John the Baptist." Let us then study the leading features of his ministry.

John the Baptist spoke plainly about sin. He taught the absolute necessity of "repentance," before any one can be saved. He preached that repentance must be proved by its "fruits." He warned men not to rest on outward privileges, or outward union with the church.

This is just the teaching that we all need. We are naturally dead, and blind, and asleep in spiritual things. We are ready to content ourselves with a mere formal religion, and to flatter ourselves, that if we go to church we shall be saved. We need to be told, that except we "repent and are converted" we shall all perish.

John the Baptist spoke plainly about our Lord Jesus Christ. He taught people that one far "mightier than himself" was coming among them. He was nothing more than a servant--the Coming One was the King. He himself could only "baptize with water"--the Coming One could "baptize with the Holy Spirit," take away sins, and would one day judge the world.

This again is the very teaching that human nature requires. We need to be sent direct to Christ. We are all ready to stop short of this. We want to rest in our union with the church, regular use of the sacraments, and diligent attendance on an established ministry. We ought to be told the absolute necessity of union with Christ Himself by faith. He is the appointed fountain of mercy, grace, life, and peace. We must each have personal dealings with Him about our souls. What do we know of the Lord Jesus? What have we got from Him? These are the questions on which our salvation hinges.

John the Baptist spoke plainly about the Holy Spirit. He preached that there was such a thing as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He taught that it was the special office of the Lord Jesus to give it to men.

This again is a teaching which we greatly require. We need to be told that forgiveness of sin is not the only thing necessary to salvation. There is another thing yet; and that is the baptizing of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. There must not only be the work of Christ FOR us, but the work of the Holy Spirit IN us. There must not only be a title to heaven by the blood of Christ, but a preparedness for heaven wrought in us by the Spirit of Christ. Let us never rest until we know something by experience of the baptism of the Spirit. The baptism of water is a great privilege. But let us see to it that we have also the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist spoke plainly about the dreadful danger of the impenitent and unbelieving. He told his hearers that there was a "wrath to come." He preached of an "unquenchable fire," in which the chaff would one day be burned.

This again is a teaching which is deeply important. We need to be straitly warned, that it is no light matter whether we repent or not. We need to be

reminded, that there is a hell as well as a heaven, and an everlasting punishment for the wicked, as well as everlasting life for the godly. We are fearfully apt to forget this. We talk of the love and mercy of God, and we do not remember sufficiently His justness and holiness. Let us be very careful on this point. It is no real kindness to keep back the terrors of the Lord. It is good for us all to be taught that it is possible to be lost forever, and that all unconverted people are hanging over the brink of the pit.

In the last place, John the Baptist spoke plainly about the safety of true believers. He taught, that there was "a barn" for all who are Christ's wheat, and that they would be gathered together there in the day of his appearing.

This again is a teaching which human nature greatly requires. The best of believers need much encouragement. They are yet in the body. They live in a wicked world. They are often tempted by the devil. They ought to be often reminded, that Jesus will never leave them nor forsake them. He will guide them safely through this life, and at length give them eternal glory. They shall be hidden in the day of wrath. They shall be safe as Noah in the ark.

Let these things sink down deeply into our hearts. We live in a day of much false teaching. Let us never forget the leading features of a faithful ministry. Happy would it have been for the Church of Christ, if all its ministers had been more like John the Baptist!

MATTHEW 3:13-17

Verses 13-17. The King’s baptism

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. But John would have hindered him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?"

But Jesus, answering, said to him, "Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfil all righteousness." Then he allowed him. Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

You have here the account of our Lord Jesus Christ's baptism. This was His first step, when He entered on His ministry. When the Jewish priests took up their office at the age of thirty, they were washed with water. When our great

High Priest begins the great work He came into the world to accomplish, He is publicly baptized.

Let us learn from these verses to regard the sacrament of baptism with reverence. An ordinance of which the Lord Jesus Himself partook, is not to be lightly esteemed. An ordinance to which the great Head of the Church submitted, ought to be ever honourable in the eyes of professing Christians.

There are few subjects in religion on which greater mistakes have arisen than baptism. There are few which require so much fencing and guarding. Let us arm our minds with two general cautions.

Let us beware on the one hand, that we do not attach a SUPERSTITIOUS importance to the water of baptism. We must not expect that water to act as a charm. We must not suppose that all baptized people as a matter of course receive the grace of God, in the moment that they are baptized. To say that all who come to baptism obtain like and equal benefit--and that it matters not a jot whether they come with faith and prayer, or in utter carelessness, to say such things appears to contradict the plainest lessons of Scripture.

Let us beware on the other hand, that we do not DISHONOR the sacrament of baptism. It is dishonoured when it is thrust out of sight, and never publicly noticed in the congregation. A sacrament ordained by Christ Himself ought not to be treated in this way. The admission of every new member into the ranks of the visible church, whether young or grown up, is an event which ought to excite a lively interest in a Christian assembly. It is an event that ought to call forth the fervent prayers of all praying people. The more deeply we are convinced that baptism and grace are not inseparably tied together, the more we ought to feel bound to join in prayer for a blessing, whenever any one is baptized.

The baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ was attended by circumstances of peculiar solemnity. Such a baptism never will be again, so long as the world stands.

We are told of the presence of all three people of the blessed Trinity. God the Son, manifest in the flesh, is baptized. God the Spirit descends like a dove, and lights upon Him. God the Father speaks from heaven with a voice. In a word we have the manifested presence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Surely we may regard this as a public announcement, that the work of Christ was the result of the eternal counsels of all the Three. It was the whole Trinity, which at the beginning of creation said, "let us make man." It was the whole Trinity again, which at the beginning of the Gospel seemed to say, "let us save man."

We are told of "a voice from heaven" at our Lord's baptism. This was a circumstance of singular solemnity. We read of no voice from heaven before this, except at the giving of the law on Sinai. Both occasions were of peculiar importance. It therefore seemed good to our Father in heaven to mark both with peculiar honour. At the introduction both of the law and Gospel, He Himself speaks.

How striking and deeply instructive are the Father's words! "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He declares, in these words, that Jesus is the divine Saviour sealed and appointed from all eternity to carry out the work of redemption. He proclaims, that He accepts Him as the Mediator between God and man. He seems to publish to the world, that He is satisfied with Him as the propitiation, the substitute, the ransom-payer for the lost family of Adam, and the Head of a redeemed people. In Him He sees His holy "law magnified and made honourable." Through Him He can "be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly." (Rom. 3:26.)

May we ponder these words well! They are full of rich food for thought. They are full of peace, joy, comfort and consolation, for all who have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, and committed their souls to Him for salvation. Such may rejoice in the thought, that though in themselves sinful, yet in God's sight they are counted righteous. The Father regards them as members of His beloved Son. He sees in them no spot, and for His son's sake is "well pleased." (Ephes. 1:6.)



Eastern Orthodox church near Capernaum

Chapter 4

4. The testing of the King

MATTHEW 4:1-11

Verses 1-11. The testing by the devil

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry afterward. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him into the holy city. He set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge concerning you.' and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you don't dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not test the Lord, your God.'"

Again, the devil took him to an exceedingly high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory. He said to him, "I will give you all of these things, if you will fall down and worship me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Get behind me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and served him.

The first event in our Lord's ministry which Matthew records after His baptism, is His temptation. This is a deep and mysterious subject. There is much in the history of it which we cannot explain. But there lie on the face of the history plain practical lessons, to which we shall do well to take heed.

Let us learn in the first place, what a real and mighty enemy we have in the devil. He is not afraid to assault even the Lord Jesus Himself. Three times over he attacks God's own Son. Our Savior was "tempted by the devil." It was the devil who brought sin into the world at the beginning. This is he, who vexed Job, deceived David, and gave Peter a heavy fall. This is he, whom the Bible calls a "murderer," a "liar," and a "roaring lion." This is he, whose enmity to our souls never slumbers and never sleeps. This is he, who for nearly 6000 years has been working at one work--to ruin men and women, and draw them to hell. This is he, whose cunning and subtlety pass man's understanding, and who often appears as "an angel of light."

Let us all watch and pray daily against his devices. There is no enemy worse than an enemy who is never seen and never dies, who is near to us wherever we live, and goes with us wherever we go. Not least let us beware of that levity and jesting about the devil, which is so unhappily common. Let us remember every day, that if we would be saved, we must not only crucify the flesh, and overcome the world, but also "resist the devil."

Let us learn in the next place, that we must not count temptation a strange thing. "The disciple is not greater than his master, nor the servant than his lord." If Satan came to Christ, he will also come to Christians.

It would be well for all believers, if they would remember this. They are too apt to forget it. They often find evil thoughts arising within their minds, which they can truly say they hate. Doubts, questions, and sinful imaginings are suggested to them, against which their whole inward man revolts. But let not

these things destroy their peace, and rob them of their comforts. Let them remember there is a devil, and not be surprised to find him near them. To be tempted is in itself no sin. It is the yielding to the temptation, and giving it a place in our hearts, which we must fear.

Let us learn in the next place, that the chief weapon we ought to use in resisting Satan is the Bible. Three times the great enemy offered temptations to our Lord. Three times his offer was refused, with a text of Scripture as the reason, "it is written."

Here is one among many reasons, why we ought to be diligent readers of our Bibles. The Word is the sword of the Spirit. We shall never fight a good fight, if we do not use it as our principal weapon. The Word is the lamp for our feet. We shall never keep the king's highway to heaven, if we do not journey by its light. It may well be feared, that there is not enough Bible-reading among us. It is not sufficient to have the Book. We must actually read it, and pray over it ourselves. It will do us no good, if it only lies still in our houses. We must be actually familiar with its contents, and have its texts stored in our memories and minds. Knowledge of the Bible never comes by intuition. It can only be obtained by diligent, regular, daily, attentive, wakeful reading. Do we grudge the time and trouble this will cost us? If we do, we are not yet fit for the kingdom of God.

Let us learn in the last place, what a sympathizing Savior the Lord Jesus Christ is. "In that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted." (Heb. 2:18.)

The sympathy of Jesus is a truth which ought to be peculiarly dear to all believers. They will find in it a mine of strong consolation. They should never forget, that they have a mighty Friend in heaven, who feels for them in all their temptations, and can enter into all their spiritual anxieties. Are they ever tempted by Satan to distrust God's care and goodness? So was Jesus. Are they ever tempted to presume on God's mercy, and run into danger without warrant? So also was Jesus. Are they ever tempted to commit some one great private sin for the sake of some great seeming advantage? So also was Jesus. Are they ever tempted to listen to some misapplication of Scripture, as an excuse for doing wrong? So also was Jesus. He is just the Savior that a tempted people require. Let them flee to Him for help, and spread before Him all their troubles. They will find His ear ever ready to hear, and His heart ever ready to feel He can understand their sorrows.

May we all know the value of a sympathizing Savior by experience! There is nothing to be compared to it in this cold and deceitful world. Those who seek

their happiness in this life only, and despise the religion of the Bible, have no idea what true comfort they are missing.

MATTHEW 4:12-25

Verses 12-25. The King begins His public ministry

Now when Jesus heard that John was delivered up, he withdrew into Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he came and lived in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness saw a great light, to those who sat in the region and shadow of death, to them light has dawned."

From that time, Jesus began to preach, and to say, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

Walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers: Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers for men."

They immediately left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them. They immediately left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. The report about him went out into all Syria. They brought to him all who were sick, afflicted with various diseases and torments, possessed with demons, epileptics, and paralytics; and he healed them. Great multitudes from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan followed him.

We have in these verses the beginning of our Lord's ministry among men. He enters on His labors among a dark and ignorant people. He chooses men to be His companions and disciples. He confirms His ministry by miracles, which rouse the attention of "all Syria," and draw multitudes to hear Him.

Let us notice the way in which our Lord commenced His mighty work. "He began to preach." There is no office so honourable as that of the preacher. There

is no work so important to the souls of men. It is an office which the Son of God was not ashamed to take up. It is an office to which He appointed His twelve apostles. It is an office to which Paul in his old age specially directs Timothy's attention. He charges him with almost his last breath to "preach the word." It is the means which God has always been pleased to use above any other, for the conversion and edification of souls. The brightest days of the Church have been those when preaching has been honoured. The darkest days of the Church have been those when it has been lightly esteemed. Let us honour the sacraments and public prayers of the Church, and reverently use them. But let us beware that we do not place them above preaching.

Let us notice the first doctrine which the Lord Jesus proclaimed to the world. He began to say "repent!" The necessity of repentance is one of the great foundations, which lie at the very bottom of Christianity. It needs to be pressed on all mankind without exception. High or low, rich or poor, all have sinned and are guilty before God; and all must repent and be converted, if they would be saved. And true repentance is no light matter. It is a thorough change of heart about sin, a change showing itself in godly sorrow and humiliation--in heartfelt confession before the throne of grace--in a complete breaking off from sinful habits, and an abiding hatred of all sin. Such repentance is the inseparable companion of saving faith in Christ. Let us prize the doctrine highly. It is of the highest importance. No Christian teaching can be called sound, which does not constantly bring forward "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:21.)

Let us notice the class of men whom the Lord Jesus chose to be His disciples. They were of the poorest and humblest rank in life. Peter, and Andrew, and James, and John, were all "fishermen."

The religion of our Lord Jesus Christ was not intended for the rich and learned alone. It was intended for all the world--and the majority of all the world will always be the poor. Poverty and ignorance of books excluded thousands from the notice of the boastful philosophers of the heathen world. They exclude no one from the highest place in the service of Christ. Is a man humble? Does he feel his sins? Is he willing to hear Christ's voice and follow Him? If this be so, he may be the poorest of the poor, but he shall be found as high as any in the kingdom of heaven. Intellect and money are worth nothing without grace.

The religion of Christ must have been from heaven, or it never could have prospered and overspread the earth as it has done. It is vain for infidels to attempt to answer this argument. It cannot be answered. A religion which did not flatter the rich, the great, and the learned--a religion which offered no license

to the carnal inclinations of man's heart--a religion whose first teachers were poor fishermen, without wealth, rank, or power--such a religion could never have turned the world upside down, if it had not been of God. Look at the Roman emperors and the heathen priests with their splendid temples on the one side! Look at a few unlearned working men with the Gospel on the other! Were there ever two parties so unequally matched? Yet the weak proved strong, and the strong proved weak. Heathenism fell, and Christianity took its place. Christianity must be of God.

Let us notice in the last place the general character of the miracles by which our Lord confirmed His mission. Here we are told of them in the mass. Hereafter we shall read many of them described particularly. And what is their character? They were miracles of mercy and kindness. Our Lord "went about doing good."

These miracles are meant to teach us our Lord's power. He that could heal sick people with a touch, and cast out devils with a word, is "able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him." He is almighty.

These miracles are meant to be types and emblems of our Lord's skill as a spiritual physician. He before whom no bodily disease proved incurable, is mighty to cure every ailment of our souls. There is no broken heart that He cannot heal. There is no wound of conscience that He cannot cure. Fallen, crushed, bruised, plague-stricken as we all are by sin, Jesus by His blood and Spirit can make us whole. Only let us go to Him.

These miracles not least are intended to show us Christ's heart. He is a most compassionate Saviour. He rejected no one who came to Him. He refused no one, however loathsome and diseased. He had an ear to hear all, and a hand to help all, and a heart to feel for all. There is no kindness like His. His compassions fail not.

May we all remember that Jesus is "the same yesterday, today, and forever!" High in heaven at God's right hand, He is not in the least altered. He is just as able to save, just as willing to receive, just as ready to help, as He was 1800 years ago. Would we have spread out our needs before Him then? Let us do the same now. He can "heal every disease and every sickness."

Chapters 5-7. Kingdom proclamations of the King

Chapter 5

5:1-16. Character of the citizens of the kingdom

MATTHEW 5:1-12

Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

"Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

The three chapters which begin with these verses deserve the special attention of all readers of the Bible. They contain what is commonly called the "sermon on the mount."

Every word of the Lord Jesus ought to be most precious to professing Christians. It is the voice of the chief Shepherd. It is the charge of the great Bishop and Head of the Church. It is the Master speaking. It is the word of Him who "spoke as never man spoke," and by whom we shall all be judged at the last day.

Would we know what kind of people Christians ought to be? Would we know the character at which Christians ought to aim? Would we know the outward walk and inward habit of mind which become a follower of Jesus? Then let us often study the sermon on the mount. Let us often ponder each sentence, and prove ourselves by it. Not least let us often consider who they are that are called BLESSED at the beginning of the sermon. Those whom the great High Priest blesses are blessed indeed.

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are poor in spirit. He means the humble, and lowly-minded, and self-abased. He means those who are deeply convinced of their own sinfulness in God's sight. These are they who are not "wise in their own eyes and holy in their own sight." They are not "rich and increased with goods." They do not imagine that they need nothing. They regard themselves as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Blessed are all such! Humility is the very first letter in the alphabet of Christianity. We must begin low, if we would build high.

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who mourn. He means those who sorrow for sin, and grieve daily over their own short-comings. These are they who trouble themselves more about sin than about anything on earth. The remembrance of it is grievous to them. The burden of it is intolerable. Blessed are all such! "The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite spirit." One day they shall weep no more. "They shall be comforted."

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are meek. He means those who are of a patient and contented spirit. They are willing to put up with little honor here below. They can bear injuries without resentment. They are not ready to take offence. Like Lazarus in the parable, they are content to wait for their good things. Blessed are all such! They are never losers in the long run. One day they shall "reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:10.)

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who hunger and thirst after righteousness. He means those who desire above all things to be entirely conformed to the mind of God. They long not so much to be rich, or wealthy, or learned, as to be holy. Blessed are all such! They shall have enough one day. They shall "awake up after God's likeness and be satisfied." (Psalm. 17:15.)

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are merciful. He means those who are full of compassion towards others. They pity all who are suffering either from sin or sorrow, and are tenderly desirous to make their sufferings less. They are full of good works, and endeavours to do good. Blessed are all such! Both in this life and that to come they shall reap a rich reward.

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are pure in heart. He means those who do not aim merely at outward correctness, but at inward holiness. They are not satisfied with a mere external show of religion. They strive to keep a heart and conscience void of offence, and to serve God with the spirit and the inner man. Blessed are all such! The heart is the man. "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7.) He that is most spiritual-minded will have most communion with God.

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are peacemakers. He means those who use all their influence to promote peace and charity on earth, in private and in public, at home and abroad. He means those who strive to make all men love one another, by teaching that Gospel which says, "love is the fulfilling of the law." Blessed are all such! They are doing the very work which the Son of God began, when he came to earth the first time, and which He will finish when He returns the second time.

Lastly, the Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are persecuted for righteousness sake. He means those who are laughed at, mocked, despised, and ill-used, because they endeavour to live as true Christians. Blessed are all such! They drink of the same cup which their Master drank. They are now confessing Him before men, and He will confess them before His Father and the angels at the last day. "Great is their reward."

Such are the eight foundation-stones, which the Lord lays down at the beginning of the sermon on the mount. Eight great testing truths are placed before us. May we mark well each one of them, and learn wisdom!

Let us learn how entirely contrary are the principles of Christ to the principles of the world. It is vain to deny it. They are almost diametrically opposed. The very characters which the Lord Jesus praises, the world despises. The very pride, and thoughtlessness, and high tempers, and worldliness, and selfishness, and formality, and unlovingness, which abound everywhere, the Lord Jesus condemns.

Let us learn how unhappily different is the teaching of Christ from the practice of many professing Christians. Where shall we find men and women among those who go to churches and chapels, who are striving to live up to the pattern we have read of today? Alas! there is much reason to fear, that many baptized people are utterly ignorant of what the New Testament contains.

Above all let us learn how holy and spiritual-minded all believers should be. They should never aim at any standard lower than that of the sermon on the mount. Christianity is eminently a practical religion. Sound doctrine is its root and foundation, but holy living should always be its fruit. And if we would know what holy living is, let us often bethink ourselves who they are that Jesus calls "blessed."

5:17-48. The King and the Mosaic law

MATTHEW 5:13-20

"You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden. Neither do you light a lamp, and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are in the house. Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

"Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill. For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished. Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

In these verses the Lord Jesus treats of two subjects. One is the character which true Christians must support and maintain in the world. The other is the relation between His doctrines and those of the Old Testament. It is of great importance to have clear views on both these subjects.

True Christians are to be in the world like SALT. Now salt has a peculiar taste of its own, utterly unlike anything else. When mingled with other substances, it preserves them from corruption. It imparts a portion of its taste to everything it is mixed with. It is useful so long as it preserves its savor, but no longer. Are we true Christians? Then behold here our place and its duties!

True Christians are to be in the world like LIGHT. Now it is the property of light to be utterly distinct from darkness. The least spark in a dark room can be seen at once. Of all things created light is the most useful. It fertilizes. It guides. It cheers. It was the first thing called into being. Without it the world would be a gloomy blank. Are we true Christians? Then behold again our position and its responsibilities!

Surely, if words mean anything, we are meant to learn from these two figures, that there must be something marked, distinct, and peculiar about our character, if we are true Christians. It will never do to idle through life, thinking

and living like others, if we mean to be owned by Christ as His people. Have we grace? Then it must be seen. Have we the Spirit? Then there must be fruit. Have we any saving religion? Then there must be a difference of habits, tastes, and turn of mind, between us and those who think only of the world. It is perfectly clear that true Christianity is something more than being baptized and going to church. "Salt" and "light" evidently imply peculiarity both of heart and life, of faith and practice. We must dare to be singular and unlike the world, if we mean to be saved.

The relation between our Lord's teaching and that of the Old Testament, is cleared up by our Lord in one striking sentence. He says, "Don't think that I came to destroy the law, or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill." These are remarkable words. They were deeply important when spoken, as satisfying the natural anxiety of the Jews on the point. They will be deeply important as long as the world stands, as a testimony that the religion of the Old and New Testament is one harmonious whole.

The Lord Jesus came to fulfill the predictions of the prophets, who had long foretold that a Saviour would one day appear. He came to fulfill the ceremonial law, by becoming the great sacrifice for sin, to which all the Mosaic offerings had ever pointed. He came to fulfil the moral law, by yielding to it a perfect obedience, which we could never have yielded--and by paying the penalty for our breach of it with His atoning blood, which we could never have paid. In all these ways He exalted the law of God, and made its importance more evident even than it had been before. In a word, "He magnified the law and made it honourable." (Isaiah 42:21.)

There are deep lessons of wisdom to be learned from these words of our Lord. Let us consider them well, and lay them up in our hearts.

Let us beware of despising the Old Testament under any pretense whatever. Let us never listen to those who bid us throw it aside as an obsolete, antiquated, useless book. The religion of the Old Testament is the embryo of Christianity. The Old Testament is the Gospel in the bud. The New Testament is the Gospel in full flower. The Old Testament is the Gospel in the blade. The New Testament is the Gospel in full ear. The saints in the Old Testament saw many things through a glass darkly. But they all looked by faith to the same Savior, and were led by the same Spirit as ourselves. These are no light matters. Much infidelity begins with an ignorant contempt of the Old Testament.

Let us, for another thing, beware of despising the law of the Ten Commandments. Let us not suppose for a moment that it is set aside by the

Gospel, or that Christians have nothing to do with it. The coming of Christ did not alter the position of the Ten Commandments one hair's breadth. If anything, it exalted and raised their authority. (Rom. 3:31.) The law of the Ten Commandments is God's eternal measure of right and wrong. By it, is the knowledge of sin. By it, the Spirit shows men their need of Christ, and drives them to Him. To it, Christ refers His people as their rule and guide for holy living. In its right place it is just as important as "the glorious Gospel." It cannot save us. We cannot be justified by it. But never, never let us despise it. It is a symptom of an ignorant and unhealthy state of religion, when the law is lightly esteemed. The true Christian "delights in God's law." (Rom. 7:22.)

In the last place, let us beware of supposing that the Gospel has lowered the standard of personal holiness, and that the Christian is not intended to be as strict and particular about his daily life as the Jew. This is an immense mistake, but one that is unhappily very common. So far from this being the case, the sanctification of the New Testament saint ought to exceed that of him who has nothing but the Old Testament for his guide. The more light we have, the more we ought to love God. The more clearly we see our own complete and full forgiveness in Christ, the more heartily ought we to work for His glory. We know what it cost to redeem us far better than the Old Testament saints did. We have read what happened in Gethsemane and on Calvary, and they only saw it dimly and indistinctly as a thing yet to come. May we never forget our obligations! The Christian who is content with a low standard of personal holiness has got much to learn.

MATTHEW 5:21-37

"You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, 'You shall not murder;' and 'Whoever shall murder shall be in danger of the judgment.' But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna.

"If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are with him in the way; lest perhaps the prosecutor deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Most certainly I tell you, you shall by no means get out of there, until you have paid the last penny.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery;' but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna. If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna."

"It was also said, 'Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorce,' but I tell you that whoever puts away his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries her when she is put away commits adultery.

"Again you have heard that it was said to them of old time, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall perform to the Lord your vows,' but I tell you, don't swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, for you can't make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No.' Whatever is more than these is of the evil one.

These verses deserve the closest attention of all readers of the Bible. A right understanding of the doctrines they contain lies at the very root of Christianity. The Lord Jesus here explains more fully the meaning of His words, "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil." He teaches us that His Gospel magnifies the law, and exalts its authority. He shows us that the law, as expounded by Him, was a far more spiritual and heart-searching rule than most of the Jews supposed. And He proves this by selecting three commandments out of the ten as examples of what He means.

He expounds the sixth commandment. Many thought that they kept this part of God's law, so long as they did not commit actual MURDER. The Lord Jesus shows, that its requirements go much further than this. It condemns all angry and passionate language, and especially when used without a cause. Let us mark this well. We may be perfectly innocent of taking life away, and yet be guilty of breaking the sixth commandment.

He expounds the seventh commandment. Many supposed that they kept this part of God's law, if they did not actually commit ADULTERY. The Lord Jesus teaches, that we may break it in our thoughts, hearts, and imaginations, even

when our outward conduct is moral and correct. The God with whom we have to do looks far beyond actions. With him even a glance of the eye may be a sin.

He expounds the third commandment. Many fancied that they kept this part of God's law, so long as they did not swear falsely, and performed their OATHS. The Lord Jesus forbids all vain and light swearing altogether. All swearing by created things, even when God's name is not brought forward--all calling upon God to witness, excepting on the most solemn occasions, is a great sin.

Now all this is very instructive. It ought to raise very serious reflections in our minds. It calls us loudly to use great searching of heart. And what does it teach?

It teaches us the exceeding holiness of God. He is a most pure and perfect Being, who sees faults and imperfections, where man's eyes often see none. He reads our inward motives. He notes our words and thoughts, as well as our actions. "He requires truth in the inward parts." Oh! that men would consider this part of God's character more than they do! There would be no room for pride, and self-righteousness, and carelessness, if they only saw God "as He is."

It teaches us the exceeding ignorance of man in spiritual things. There are thousands and ten thousands of professing Christians, it may be feared, who know no more of the requirements of God's law than the most ignorant Jews. They know the letter of the ten commandments well enough. They fancy, like the young ruler, "all these have I kept from my youth up." They never dream that it is possible to break the sixth and seventh commandments, if they do not break them by outward act or deed. And so they live on satisfied with themselves, and quite content with their little bit of religion. Happy indeed are they who really understand God's law!

It teaches us our exceeding need of the Lord Jesus Christ's atoning blood to save us. What man or woman upon earth can ever stand before such a God as this, and plead "not guilty?" Who is there that has ever grown to years of discretion, and not broken the commandments thousands of times? "There is none righteous, no! not one." Without a mighty Mediator, every one would be condemned in the judgment. Ignorance of the real meaning of the law is one plain reason why so many do not value the Gospel, and content themselves with a little formal Christianity. They do not see the strictness and holiness of God's Ten Commandments. If they did, they would never rest until they were safe in Christ.

In the last place, this passage teaches us the exceeding importance of avoiding all occasions of sin. If we really desire to be holy, we must "take heed to our ways, that we offend not in our tongues." We must be ready to make up quarrels and disagreements, lest they gradually lead on to greater evils. "The beginning of strife is like breaching a dam." We must labor to crucify our flesh and mortify our members, to make any sacrifice and endure any bodily inconvenience rather than sin. We must keep our lips as it were with a bridle, and exercise an hourly strictness over our words. Let men call us precise, if they will, for so doing. Let them say, if they please, that we are "too particular." We need not be moved. We are merely doing as our Lord Jesus Christ bids us, and, if this is the case, we have no cause to be ashamed.

MATTHEW 5:38-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, don't resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. If anyone sues you to take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and don't turn away him who desires to borrow from you.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

You have here our Lord Jesus Christ's rules for our conduct one towards another. He that would know how He ought to feel and act towards his fellow men, should often study these verses. They deserve to be written in letters of gold. They have extorted praise even from the enemies of Christianity. Let us mark well what they contain.

The Lord Jesus forbids everything like an unforgiving and revengeful spirit. A readiness to resent injuries--a quickness in taking offence--a quarrelsome and contentious disposition--a keenness in asserting our rights--all, all are contrary to the mind of Christ. The world may see no harm in these habits of mind. But

they do not correspond to the character of the Christian. Our Master says, "Don't resist him who is evil."

The Lord Jesus enjoins on us a spirit of universal love and charity. We ought to put away all malice. We ought to return good for evil, and blessing for cursing. We ought to "love even our enemies." Moreover we are not to love in word only, but in deed. We are to deny ourselves, and take trouble, in order to be kind and courteous. If any man "compels you to go one mile, go with him two." We are to put up with much and bear much, rather than hurt another, or give offence. In all things we are to be unselfish. Our thought must never be, "how do others behave to me?" but "what would Christ have me to do?"

A standard of conduct like this may seem, at first sight, extravagantly high. But we must never content ourselves with aiming at one lower. We must observe the two weighty arguments by which our Lord backs up this part of His instruction. They deserve serious attention.

For one thing, if we do not aim at the spirit and temper which are here recommended, we are not yet children of God. Our "Father in heaven" is kind to all. He sends rain on good and on evil alike. He causes "His sun" to shine on all without distinction. A son should be like his father. But where is our likeness to our Father in heaven, if we cannot show mercy and kindness to everybody? Where is the evidence that we are new creatures, if we lack charity? It is altogether lacking. We must yet be "born again." (John 3:7.)

For another thing, if we do not aim at the spirit and temper here recommended, we are manifestly yet of the world. Even those who have no religion can "love those who love them." They can do good and show kindness, when their affection or interest moves them. But a Christian ought to be influenced by higher principles than these. Do we flinch from the test? Do we find it impossible to do good to our enemies? If that be the case, we may be sure we have yet to be converted. As yet we have not "received the Spirit of God." (1 Cor. 2:12.)

There is much in all this which calls loudly for solemn reflection. There are few passages of Scripture so calculated to raise in our minds humbling thoughts. We have here a lovely picture of the Christian as he ought to be. We cannot look at it without painful feelings. We must all allow that it differs widely from the Christian as he is. Let us carry away from it two general lessons.

In the first place if the spirit of these ten verses were more continually remembered by true believers, they would recommend Christianity to the world

far more than they do. We must not allow ourselves to suppose that the least words in this passage are trifling and of small moment. They are not so. It is attention to the spirit of this passage which makes our religion beautiful. It is the neglect of the things which it contains by which our religion is deformed. Unfailing courtesy, kindness, tenderness, and consideration for others, are some of the greatest ornaments to the character of the child of God. The world can understand these things, if it cannot understand doctrine. There is no religion in rudeness, roughness, bluntness, and incivility. The perfection of practical Christianity consists in attending to the little duties of holiness as well as to the great.

In the second place, if the spirit of these ten verses had more dominion and power in the world, how much happier the world would be than it is. Who does not know that quarrelings, strifes, selfishness, and unkindness cause half the miseries by which mankind is visited? Who can fail to see that nothing would so much tend to increase happiness as the spread of Christian love, such as is here recommended by our Lord? Let us all remember this. Those who fancy that true religion has any tendency to make men unhappy, are greatly mistaken. It is the absence of it that does this, and not the presence. True religion has the directly contrary effect. It tends to promote peace, and charity, and kindness, and goodwill among men. The more men are brought under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the more they will love one another, and the more happy they will be.

Chapter 6

6:1-18. Heirs of the kingdom and prayer

MATTHEW 6:1-8

"Be careful that you don't do your charitable giving before men, to be seen by them, or else you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Therefore when you do merciful deeds, don't sound a trumpet before yourself, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may get glory from men. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you do merciful deeds, don't let your left hand know what your right hand does, so that your merciful deeds may be in secret, then your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

"When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most certainly, I tell you, they have received their reward. But you, when you pray, enter into your inner chamber, and having shut your door, pray

to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. In praying, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. Therefore don't be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him."

In this part of the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus gives us instruction on two subjects. One is that of giving alms. The other is that of prayer. Both were subjects to which the Jews attached great importance. Both in themselves deserve the serious attention of all professing Christians.

Observe that our Lord takes it for granted, that all who call themselves His disciples will GIVE ALMS. He assumes as a matter of course, that they will think it a solemn duty to give, according to their means, to relieve the needs of others. The only point He handles is the manner in which the duty should be done. This is a weighty lesson. It condemns the selfish stinginess of many in the matter of giving money. How many are "rich towards themselves," but poor towards God! How many never give a farthing to do good to the bodies and souls of men! And have such people any right to be called Christians, in their present state of mind? It may be well doubted. A giving Savior should have giving disciples.

Observe again that our Lord takes it for granted, that all who call themselves His disciples will PRAY. He assumes this also as a matter of course. He only gives directions as to the best way of praying. This is another lesson which deserves to be continually remembered. It teaches plainly that prayerless people are not genuine Christians. It is not enough to join in the prayers of the congregation on Sundays, or attend the prayer of a family on week-days. There must be private prayer also. Without this we may be outward members of Christ's church, but we are not living members of Christ.

But what are the rules laid down for our guidance about almsgiving and praying? They are few and simple. But they contain much matter for thought.

In GIVING, everything like ostentation is to be abhorred and avoided. We are not to give as if we wished everybody to see how liberal and charitable we are, and desired the praise of our fellow men. We are to shun everything like display. We are to give quietly, and make as little noise as possible about our charities. We are to aim at the spirit of the proverbial saying, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand does."

In PRAYING, the principal object to be sought, is to be alone with God. We should endeavour to find some place where no mortal eye sees us, and where we

can pour out our hearts with the feeling that no one is looking at us but God. This is a rule which many find it very difficult to follow. The poor man and the servant often find it almost impossible to be really alone. But it is a rule which we must all make great efforts to obey. Necessity, in such cases, is often the mother of invention. When a person has a real desire to find some place, where he can be in secret with his God, he will generally find a way.

In all our duties, whether giving, or praying, the great thing to be kept in mind is, that we have to do with a heart-searching and all-knowing God. Everything like formality, affectation, or mere bodily service, is abominable and worthless in God's sight. He takes no account of the quantity of money we give, or the quantity of words we use. The one thing at which His all-seeing eye looks is the nature of our motives, and the state of our hearts. "Our Father sees in secret."

May we all remember these things. Here lies a rock, on which many are continually making spiritual shipwreck. They flatter themselves that all must be right with their souls, if they only perform a certain amount of "religious duties." They forget that God does not regard the quantity, but the quality of our service. His favour is not to be bought, as many seem to suppose, by the formal repetition of a number of words, or the self-righteous payment of a sum of money to a charitable institution. Where are our hearts? Are we doing all, whether we give or pray, "as to the Lord, and not to men?" Do we realize the eye of God? Do we simply and solely desire to please Him, who "sees in secret," and by whom "actions are weighed?" (1 Sam. 2:3.) Are we sincere? These are the sort of questions, with which we should daily ply our souls.

MATTHEW 6:9-15

Pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.'

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Perhaps no part of Scripture is so well known as this. Its words are familiar, wherever Christianity is found. Thousands, and tens of thousands, who never saw a Bible, or heard the pure Gospel, are acquainted with "Our Father," and

"Paternoster." Happy would it be for the world, if this prayer was as well known in the spirit, as it is in the letter!

Perhaps no part of Scripture is so full, and so simple at the same time, as this. It is the first prayer which we learn to offer up, when we are little children. Here is its simplicity. It contains the germ of everything which the most advanced saint can desire. Here is its fullness. The more we ponder every word it contains, the more we shall feel, "this prayer is of God."

The Lord's prayer consists of ten parts or sentences. There is one declaration of the Being to whom we pray. There are three prayers respecting His name, His kingdom, and His will. There are four prayers respecting our daily needs, our sins, our weakness, and our dangers. There is one profession of our feeling towards others. There is one concluding ascription of praise. In all these parts we are taught to say "we," and "our." We are to remember others, as well as ourselves. On each of these parts a volume might be written. We must content ourselves at present with taking up sentence by sentence, and marking out the direction in which each sentence points.

The first sentence declares to whom we are to pray--"Our Father who is in heaven." We are not to cry to saints and angels, but to the everlasting Father, the Father of spirits, the Lord of heaven and earth. We call Him Father, in the lowest sense, as our Creator; as Paul told the Athenians, "in him we live, and move, and have our being--we are also his offspring." (Acts 17:28.) We call Him Father in the highest sense, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, reconciling us to Himself, through the death of His Son. (Col. 1:20-22.) We profess that which the Old Testament saints only saw dimly, if at all--we profess to be His children by faith in Christ, and to have "the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father." (Rom. 8:15.) This, we must never forget, is the sonship that we must desire, if we would be saved. Without faith in Christ's blood, and union with Him, it is vain to talk of trusting in the Fatherhood of God.

The second sentence is a petition respecting God's name--"May your name be kept holy." By the "name" of God we mean all those attributes under which He is revealed to us--His power, wisdom, holiness, justice, mercy, and truth. By asking that they may be "holy," we mean that they may be made known and glorified. The glory of God is the first thing that God's children should desire. It is the object of one of our Lord's own prayers--"Father, glorify your name." (John 12:28.) It is the purpose for which the world was created. It is the end for which the saints are called and converted. It is the chief thing we should seek, that "in all things God may be glorified." (1 Peter 4:11.)

The third sentence is a petition concerning God's kingdom--"May your kingdom come." By His kingdom we mean first, the kingdom of grace which God sets up and maintains in the hearts of all living members of Christ, by His Spirit and word. But we mean chiefly, the kingdom of glory which shall one day be set up, when Jesus shall come the second time, and "all men shall know Him from the least to the greatest." This is the time when sin, and sorrow, and Satan shall be cast out of the world. It is the time when the Jews shall be converted, and the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, (Rom. 11:25,) and a time that is above all things to be desired. It therefore fills a foremost place in the Lord's prayer. We ask that which is expressed in the words of the Burial service, "that it may please you to hasten your kingdom."

The fourth sentence is a petition concerning God's will--"May your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." We here pray that God's laws may be obeyed by men as perfectly, readily, and unceasingly, as they are by angels in heaven. We ask that those who now obey not His laws, may be taught to obey them, and that those who do obey them, may obey them better. Our truest happiness is perfect submission to God's will, and it is the highest charity to pray that all mankind may know it, obey it, and submit to it.

The fifth sentence is a petition respecting our own daily needs--"give us this day our daily bread." We are here taught to acknowledge our entire dependence on God, for the supply of our daily necessities. As Israel required daily manna, so we require daily "bread." We confess that we are poor, weak, needy creatures, and beseech Him who is our Maker to take care of us. We ask for "bread," as the simplest of our needs, and in that word we include all that our bodies require.

The sixth sentence is a petition respecting our sins--"Forgive us our debts." We confess that we are sinners, and need daily grants of pardon and forgiveness. This is a part of the Lord's prayer which deserves especially to be remembered. It condemns all self-righteousness and self-justifying. We are instructed here to keep up a continual habit of confession at the throne of grace, and a continual habit of seeking mercy and remission. Let this never be forgotten. We need daily to "wash our feet." (John 13:10.)

The seventh sentence is a profession respecting our own feelings towards others--we ask our Father to "forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." This is the only profession in the whole prayer, and the only part on which our Lord comments and dwells, when He has concluded the prayer. The plain object of it is, to remind us that we must not expect our prayers for forgiveness to be heard, if we pray with malice and spite in our hearts towards others. To pray in such a frame of mind is mere formality and hypocrisy. It is

even worse than hypocrisy. It is as much as saying, "Do not forgive me at all." Our prayer is nothing without charity. We must not expect to be forgiven, if we cannot forgive.

The eighth sentence is a petition respecting our weakness--"Bring us not into temptation." It teaches us that we are liable, at all times, to be led astray, and fall. It instructs us to confess our infirmity, and beseech God to hold us up, and not allow us to run into sin. We ask Him, who orders all things in heaven and earth, to restrain us from going into that which would injure our souls, and never to allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear. (1 Cor. 10:13.)

The ninth sentence is a petition respecting our dangers--"deliver us from evil." We are here taught to ask God to deliver us from the evil that is in the world, the evil that is within our own hearts, and not least from that evil one, the devil. We confess that, so long as we are in the body, we are constantly seeing, hearing, and feeling the presence of evil. It is about us, and within us, and around us on every side. And we entreat Him, who alone can preserve us, to be continually delivering as from its power. (John 17:15.)

The last sentence is an ascription of praise--"yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory." We declare in these words our belief, that the kingdoms of this world are the rightful property of our Father--that to Him alone belongs all "power,"--and that He alone deserves to receive all "glory." And we conclude by offering to Him the profession of our hearts, that we give Him all honor and praise, and rejoice that He is King of kings, and Lord of lords.

And now let us all examine ourselves, and see whether we really desire to have the things which we are taught to ask for in the Lord's Prayer. Thousands, it may be feared, repeat these words daily as a form, but never consider what they are saying. They care nothing for the "glory," the "kingdom," or the "will" of God. They have no sense of dependence, sinfulness, weakness, or danger. They have no love or charity towards their enemies. And yet they repeat the Lord's Prayer! These things ought not to be so. May we resolve that, by God's help, our hearts shall go together with our lips! Happy is he who can really call God his Father through Jesus Christ his Savior, and can therefore say a heart felt "Amen" to all that the Lord's Prayer contains.

6:19-34. Heirs of the kingdom and the world

MATTHEW 6:16-24

"Moreover when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites, with sad faces. For they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen by men to be fasting. Most

certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face; so that you are not seen by men to be fasting, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.

"Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Mammon."

There are three subjects brought before us in this part of our Lord's sermon on the mount. These three are fasting, worldliness, and singleness of purpose in religion.

Fasting, or occasional abstinence from food, in order to bring the body into subjection to the spirit, is a practice frequently mentioned in the Bible, and generally in connection with prayer. David fasted, when his child was sick. Daniel fasted, when he sought special light from God. Paul and Barnabas fasted, when they appointed elders. Esther fasted, before going in to Ahasuerus. It is a subject about which we find no direct command it the New Testament. It seems to be left to every one's discretion, whether he will fast or not. There is great wisdom in this. Many a poor man never has enough to eat, and it would be an insult to tell him to fast. Many a sickly person can hardly be kept well with the closest attention to diet, and could not fast without bringing on illness. It is a matter in which every one must be persuaded in his own mind, and not be hasty to condemn others, who do not agree with him. One thing only must never be forgotten. Those who fast should do it quietly, secretly, and without ostentation. Let them not "appear to men" to fast. Let them not fast to man, but to God.

Worldliness is one of the greatest dangers that beset man's soul. It is no wonder that we find our Lord speaking strongly about it. It is an treacherous, harmful, enticing, and powerful enemy. It seems so innocent to pay close

attention to our business! It seems so harmless to seek our happiness in this world, so long as we keep clear of open sins! Yet here is a rock on which many make shipwreck to all eternity. They "lay up treasure on earth," and forget to "lay up treasure in heaven." May we all remember this! Where are our hearts? What do we love best? Are our chief affections on things in earth, or things in heaven? Life or death depends on the answer we can give to these questions. If our treasure is earthly, our hearts will be earthly also. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be."

Singleness of purpose is one great secret of spiritual prosperity. If our eyes do not see distinctly, we cannot walk without stumbling and falling. If we attempt to work for two different masters, we are sure to give satisfaction to neither. It is just the same with respect to our souls. We cannot serve Christ and the world at the same time. It is vain to attempt it. The thing cannot be done. The ark and Dagon will never stand together. God must be king over our hearts. His law, His will, His precepts must receive our first attention. Then, and not until then, everything in our inward man will fall into its right place. Unless our hearts are so ordered, everything will be in confusion. "Your whole body will be full of darkness."

Let us learn from our Lord's instruction about fasting, the great importance of cheerfulness in our religion. Those words, "anoint your head, and wash your face," are full of deep meaning. They should teach us to aim at letting men see, that we find Christianity makes us happy. Never let us forget that there is no religion in looking melancholy and gloomy. Are we dissatisfied with Christ's wages, and Christ's service? Surely not! Then let us not look as if we were.

Let us learn from our Lord's caution about worldliness what immense need we all have to watch and pray against an earthly spirit. What are the vast majority of professing Christians round us doing? They are "laying up treasure on earth." There can be no mistake about it. Their tastes, their ways, their habits tell a fearful tale. They are not "laying up treasure in heaven." Oh! let us all beware that we do not sink into hell by paying excessive attention to lawful things. Open transgression of God's law slays its thousands, but worldliness its tens of thousands.

Let us learn from our Lord's words about the "single eye," the true secret of the failures, which so many Christians seem to make in their religion. There are failures in all quarters. There are thousands in our churches uncomfortable, ill at ease, and dissatisfied with themselves, and they hardly know why. The reason is revealed here. They are trying to keep in with both sides. They are endeavoring to please God and please man, to serve Christ and serve the world at the same

time. Let us not commit this mistake. Let us be decided, thorough-going, uncompromising followers of Christ. Let out motto be that of Paul, "One thing I do." (Phil. 3:13.) Then we shall be happy Christians. We shall feel the sun shining on our faces. Heart, head, and conscience will all be full of light. Decision is the secret of happiness in religion. Be decided for Christ, and "your whole body will be full of light."

MATTHEW 6:25-34

Therefore, I tell you, don't be anxious for your life--what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor yet for your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing? See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you of much more value than they?

"Which of you, by being anxious, can add one moment to his life-span? Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin, yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, won't he much more clothe you, you of little faith?

"Therefore don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or, 'With what will we be clothed?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore don't be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day's own evil is sufficient."

These verses are a striking example of the combined wisdom and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ's teaching. He knows the heart of a man. He knows that we are all ready to turn off warnings against worldliness, by the argument that we cannot help being anxious about the things of this life. "Have we not our families to provide for? Must not our bodily needs be supplied? How can we possibly get through life, if we think first of our souls?" The Lord Jesus foresaw such thoughts, and furnished an answer.

He forbids us to keep up an anxious spirit about the things of this world. Four times over He says, "Don't be anxious." About life--about food--about clothing--about the morrow, "don't be anxious." Be not over-careful. Be not over-anxious. Prudent provision for the future is right. Wearing, corroding, self-tormenting anxiety is wrong.

He reminds us of the providential care that God continually takes of everything that He has created. Has He given us "life?" Then He will surely not let us lack anything necessary for its maintenance. Has He given us a "body?" Then He will surely not let us die for lack of clothing. He that calls us into being, will doubtless find food to feed us.

He points out the uselessness of over-anxiety. Our life is entirely in God's hand. All the care in the world will not make us continue a minute beyond the time which God has appointed. We shall not die until our work is done.

He sends us to the birds of the air for instruction. They make no provision for the future. "They don't sow, neither do they reap." They lay up no stores against time yet to come. They do not "gather into barns." They literally live from day to day on what they can pick up, by using the instinct God has put in them. They ought to teach us that no man doing his duty in the station to which God has called him, shall ever be allowed to come to poverty.

He bids us to observe the flowers of the field. Year after year they are decked with the gayest colors, without the slightest labor or exertion on their part. "They don't toil, neither do they spin." God, by His almighty power, clothes them with beauty every season. The same God is the Father of all believers. Why should they doubt that He is able to provide them with clothing, as well as the lilies "of the field?" He who takes thought for perishable flowers, will surely not neglect the bodies in which dwell immortal souls.

He suggests to us, that anxiety about the things of this world is most unworthy of a Christian. One great feature of heathenism is living for the present. Let the heathen, if he will, be anxious. He knows nothing of a Father in heaven. But let the Christian, who has clearer light and knowledge, give proof of it by his faith and contentment. When bereaved of those whom we love, we are not to "sorrow as those who have no hope." When tried by cares about this life, we are not to be over-anxious, as if we had no God, and no Christ.

He offers us a gracious promise, as a remedy against an anxious spirit. He assures us that if we "seek first" and foremost to have a place in the kingdom of grace and glory, everything that we really need in this world shall be given to us. It shall be "added," over and above our heavenly inheritance. "All things shall work together for good for those who love God." "He withholds no good thing from those who walk blamelessly." (Rom. 8:28. Psalm 84:11.)

Last of all, He seals up all His instruction on this subject, by laying down one of the wisest maxims. "Tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day's own

evil is sufficient." We are not to carry cares before they come. We are to attend to today's business, and leave tomorrow's anxieties until tomorrow dawns. We may die before tomorrow. We know not what may happen on the morrow. This only we may be assured of, that if tomorrow brings a cross, He who sends it, can and will send grace to bear it.

In all this passage there is a treasury of golden lessons. Let us seek to use them in our daily life. Let us not only read them, but turn them to practical account. Let us watch and pray against worry, and an over-anxious spirit. It deeply concerns our happiness. Half our miseries are caused by imagining things that we think are coming upon us. Half the things that we expect to come upon us, never come at all. Where is our faith? Where is our confidence in our Saviour’s words? We may well take shame to ourselves, when we read these verses, and then look into our hearts. But this we may be sure of, that David's words are true, "I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his children begging for bread." (Psalm 37:25.)

Chapter 7

7:1-14. Heirs of the kingdom and censorious judging

MATTHEW 7:1-11

"Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. For with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but don't consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you tell your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye;' and behold, the beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.

"Don't give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened. Or who is there among you, who, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, who will give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

The first portion of these verses is one of those passages of Scripture, which we must be careful not to strain beyond its proper meaning. It is frequently abused and misapplied, by the enemies of true religion. It is possible to press the words of the Bible so far that they yield not medicine, but poison.

Our Lord does not mean that it is wrong, under any circumstances, to pass an unfavourable judgment on the conduct and opinions of others. We ought to have decided opinions. We are to "prove all things." We are to "try the spirits." Nor yet does He mean that it is wrong to reprove the sins and faults of others, until we are perfect and faultless ourselves. Such an interpretation would contradict other parts of Scripture. It would make it impossible to condemn error and false doctrine. It would debar any one from attempting the office of a minister or a judge. The earth would be "given into the hands of the wicked." (Job 9:24.) Heresy would flourish. Wrong-doing would abound.

What our Lord means to condemn is a censorious and fault-finding spirit. A readiness to blame others for trifling offences, or matters of indifference--a habit of passing rash and hasty judgments--a disposition to magnify the errors and infirmities of our neighbours, and make the worst of them--this is what our Lord forbids. It was common among the Pharisees. It has always been common from their day down to the present time. We must all watch against it. We should "believe all things," and "hope all things "about others, and be very slow to find fault. This is Christian charity. (1 Cor. 13:7.)

The second lesson contained in this passage, is the importance of exercising discretion as to the person with whom we speak on the subject of religion. Everything is beautiful in its place and season. Our zeal is to be tempered by a prudent consideration of times, places, and people. "Don't reprove a scoffer," says Solomon, "lest he hate you." (Prov. 9:8.) It is not everybody to whom it is wise to open our minds on spiritual matters. There are many, who from violent tempers, or openly profligate habits, are utterly incapable of valuing the things of the Gospel. They will even fly into a passion, and run into greater excesses of sin, if you try to do good to their souls. To name the name of Christ to such people, is truly to "cast pearls before swine." It does them not good but harm. It rouses all their corruption, and makes them angry. In short, they are like the Jews at Corinth, (Acts 18:6,) or like Nabal, of whom it is written, that he was "such a worthless fellow, that a man could not speak to him." (1 Sam. 25:17.)

This is a lesson which it is peculiarly difficult to use in the proper way. The right application of it needs great wisdom. We are most of us far more likely to err on the side of over-caution than of over-zeal. We are generally far more disposed to remember the "time to be silent," than "the time to speak." It is a lesson,

however, which ought to stir up a spirit of self-inquiry in all our hearts. Do we ourselves never check our friends from giving us good advice, by our moroseness and irritability of temper? Have we never obliged others to hold their peace and say nothing, by our pride and impatient contempt of counsel? Have we never turned against our kind advisers, and silenced them by our violence and passion? Alas! we may well fear that we have erred in this matter.

The last lesson contained in this passage is the duty of prayer, and the rich encouragements there are to pray. There is a beautiful connection between this lesson and that which goes before it. Would we know when to be "silent," and when to "speak,"--when to bring forward "holy" things, and produce our "pearls?" We must pray. This is a subject to which the Lord Jesus evidently attaches great importance. The language that He uses is a plain proof of this. He employs three different words to express the idea of prayer. "Ask." "Seek." "Knock." He holds out the broadest, fullest promise to those who pray. "Everyone who asks receives." He illustrates God's readiness to hear our prayers, by an argument drawn from the notorious practice of parents on earth. "Evil" and selfish as they are by nature, they do not neglect the needs of their children according to the flesh. Much more will a God of love and mercy attend to the cries of those who are His children by grace.

Let us take special notice of these words of our Lord about prayer. Few of His sayings, perhaps, are so well known and so often repeated as this. The poorest and most unlearned can tell you, that "if we do not seek we shall not find." But what is the good of knowing it, if we do not use it? Knowledge, not improved and well employed, will only increase our condemnation at the last day.

Do we know anything of this asking, seeking, and knocking? Why should we not? There is nothing so simple and plain as praying, if a man really has a will to pray. There is nothing, unhappily, which men are so slow to do. They will use many of the forms of religion, attend many ordinances, do many things that are right, before they will do this. And yet without this no soul can be saved.

Do we ever really pray? If not, we shall at last be without excuse before God, except we repent. We shall not be condemned for not doing what we could not have done, or not knowing what we could not have known. But we shall find that one main reason why we are lost is this, that we never asked that we might be saved.

Do we indeed pray? Then let us pray on, and not faint. It is not lost labor. It is not useless. It will bear fruit after many days. That word never yet failed, "Everyone who asks receives."

7:15-29. Heirs of the kingdom warned against false teachers

MATTHEW 7:12-20

"Therefore whatever you desire for men to do to you, you shall also do to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

"Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it.

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. A good tree can't produce evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them."

In this part of the Sermon on the Mount our Lord begins to draw His discourse to a conclusion. The lessons He here enforces on our notice, are broad, general, and full of the deepest wisdom. Let us mark them in succession.

He lays down a general principle for our guidance in all doubtful questions between man and man. We are "to do to others as we would have others do to us." We are not to deal with others as others deal with us. This is mere selfishness and heathenism. We are to deal with others as we would like others to deal with us. This is real Christianity.

This is a golden rule indeed! It does not merely forbid all petty malice and revenge, all cheating and over-reaching. It does much more. It settles a hundred difficult points, which in a world like this are continually arising between man and man. It prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases. It sweeps the whole debatable ground with one mighty principle. It shows us a balance and measure, by which every one may see at once what is his duty. Is there a thing we would not like our neighbor to do to us? Then let us always remember, that this is the thing we ought not to do to him. Is there a thing we would like him to do to us? Then this is the very thing

we ought to do to him. How many intricate questions would be decided at once, if this rule were honestly used!

In the second place, our Lord gives us a general caution against the way of the many in religion. It is not enough to think as others think, and do as others do. It must not satisfy us to follow the fashion, and swim with the stream of those among whom we live. He tells us that the way that leads to everlasting life is "narrow," and "few" travel in it. He tells us that the way that leads to everlasting destruction is "broad," and full of travellers. "Many are those who enter in by it."

These are fearful truths! They ought to raise great searchings of heart in the minds of all who hear them. "Which way am I going? By what road am I travelling?" In one or other of the two ways here described, every one of us may be found. May God give us an honest, self-inquiring spirit, and show us what we are!

We may well tremble and be afraid, if our religion is that of the multitude. If we can say no more than this, that "we go where others go, and worship where others worship, and hope we shall do as well as others at last," we are literally pronouncing our own condemnation. What is this but being in the "broad way?" What is this but being in the road whose end is "destruction?" Our religion at present is not saving religion.

We have no reason to be discouraged and cast down, if the religion we profess is not popular, and few agree with us. We must remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in this passage: "The gate is narrow." Repentance, and faith in Christ, and holiness of life, have never been fashionable. The true flock of Christ has always been small. It must not move us to find that we are reckoned singular, and peculiar, and bigoted, and narrow-minded. This is "the narrow way." Surely it is better to enter into life eternal with a few, than to go to "destruction" with a great company.

In the last place, the Lord Jesus gives us a general warning against false teachers in the church. We are to "beware of false prophets." The connection between this passage and the preceding one is striking. Would we keep clear of this "broad way?" We must beware of false prophets. They will arise. They began in the days of the apostles. Even then the seeds of error were sown. They have appeared continually ever since. We must be prepared for them, and be on our guard.

This is a warning which is much needed. There are thousands who seem ready to believe anything in religion if they hear it from an ordained minister. They forget that clergymen may err as much as laymen. They are not infallible. Their teaching must be weighed in the balance of Holy Scripture. They are to be followed and believed, so long as their doctrine agrees with the Bible, but not a minute longer. We are to try them "by their fruits." Sound doctrine and holy living are the marks of true prophets. Let us remember this. Our minister's mistakes will not excuse our own. "If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch."

What is the best safe-guard against false teaching? Beyond all doubt the regular study of the word of God, with prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Bible was given to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. (Psalm. 119:105.) The man who reads it aright will never be allowed greatly to err. It is neglect of the Bible which makes so many a prey to the first false teacher whom they hear. They would have us believe that "they are not learned, and do not pretend to have decided opinions." The plain truth is that they are lazy and idle about reading the Bible, and do not like the trouble of thinking for themselves. Nothing supplies false prophets with followers so much as spiritual sloth under a cloak of humility.

May we all bear in mind our Lord's warning! The world, the devil, and the flesh, are not the only dangers in the way of the Christian. There remains another yet, and that is the "false prophet," the wolf in sheep's clothing. Happy is he who prays over his Bible and knows the difference between truth and error in religion! There is a difference, and we are meant to know it, and use our knowledge.

MATTHEW 7:21-29

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'

"Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. The rain

came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell--and great was its fall."

It happened, when Jesus had finished saying these things, that the multitudes were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them with authority, and not like the scribes.

The Lord Jesus winds up the Sermon on the Mount by a passage of heart-piercing application. He turns from false prophets to false professors, from unsound teachers to unsound hearers. Here is a word for all. May we have grace to apply it to our own hearts!

The first lesson here is the uselessness of a mere outward profession of Christianity. Not every one that says "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Not all that profess and call themselves Christians shall be saved.

Let us take notice of this. It requires far more than most people seem to think necessary, to save a soul. We may be baptized in the name of Christ, and boast confidently of our ecclesiastical privileges. We may possess head-knowledge, and be quite satisfied with our own state. We may even be preachers, and teachers of others, and do "many wonderful works" in connection with our church. But all this time are we practically doing the will of our Father in heaven? Do we truly repent, truly believe on Christ, and live holy and humble lives? If not, in spite of all our privileges and profession, we shall miss heaven at last, and be forever cast away. We shall hear those dreadful words, "I never knew you. Depart from me."

The day of judgment will reveal strange things. The hopes of many, who were thought great Christians while they lived, will be utterly confounded. The rottenness of their religion will be exposed and put to shame before the whole world. It will then be proved, that to be saved means something more than "making a profession." We must make a "practice" of our Christianity as well as a "profession." Let us often think of that great day. Let us often "judge ourselves, that we be not judged," and condemned by the Lord. Whatever else we are, let us aim at being real, true, and sincere.

The second lesson here is a striking picture of two classes of Christian hearers. Those who hear and do nothing--and those who hear and do as well as hear--are both placed before us, and their histories traced to their respective ends.

The man who hears Christian teaching, and practices what he hears, is like "a wise man who built his house on a rock." He does not content himself with

listening to exhortations to repent, believe in Christ, and live a holy life. He actually repents. He actually believes. He actually ceases to do evil, learns to do well, abhors that which is sinful, and cleaves to that which is good. He is a doer as well as a hearer. (James 1:22.)

And what is the result? In the time of trial his religion does not fail him. The floods of sickness, sorrow, poverty, disappointments, and bereavements beat upon him in vain. His soul stands unmoved. His faith does not give way. His comforts do not utterly forsake him. His religion may have cost him trouble in time past. His foundation may have been obtained with much labour and many tears. To discover his own interest in Christ may have required many a day of earnest seeking, and many an hour of wrestling in prayer. But his labour has not been thrown away. He now reaps a rich reward. The religion that can stand trial is the true religion.

The man who hears Christian teaching, and never gets beyond hearing, is like "a foolish man who built his house on the sand." He satisfies himself with listening and approving, but he goes no further. He flatters himself, perhaps, that all is right with his soul, because he has feelings, and convictions, and desires, of a spiritual kind. In these he rests. He never really breaks off from sin, and casts aside the spirit of the world. He never really lays hold of Christ. He never really takes up the cross. He is a hearer of truth, but nothing more.

And what is the end of this man's religion? It breaks down entirely under the first flood of tribulation. It fails him completely, like a summer-dried fountain, when his need is the sorest. It leaves its possessor high and dry, like a wreck on a sand bank, a scandal to the church, a by-word to the infidel, and a misery to himself. Most true is it that what costs little is worth little! A religion which costs us nothing, and consist in nothing but hearing sermons, will always prove at last to be a useless thing.

So ends the sermon on the mount. Such a sermon never was preached before. Such a sermon perhaps has never been preached since. Let us see that it has a lasting influence on our own souls. It is addressed to us as well as to those who first heard it. We are they who shall have to give account of its heart-searching lessons. It is no light matter what we think of them. The word that Jesus has spoken, "the same will judge us in the last day." (John 12:48.)

Chapters 8-9. The manifestation of the King

Chapter 8

8:1-17. The King’s over sickness

MATTHEW 8:1-15

When he came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. Behold, a leper came to him and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean."

Jesus stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, "I want to. Be made clean." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 8:4 Jesus said to him, "See that you tell nobody, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

When he came into Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking him, and saying, "Lord, my servant lies in the house paralyzed, grievously tormented."

Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

The centurion answered, "Lord, I'm not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am also a man under authority, having under myself soldiers. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and tell another, 'Come,' and he comes; and tell my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to those who followed, "Most certainly I tell you, I haven't found so great a faith, not even in Israel. I tell you that many will come from the east and the west, and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way. Let it be done for you as you have believed." His servant was healed in that hour.

When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her. She got up and served him.

The eighth chapter of Matthew's Gospel is full of our Lord's miracles. No less than five are specially recorded. There is a beautiful fitness in this. It was fitting that the greatest sermon ever preached should be immediately followed by mighty proof, that the preacher was the Son of God. Those who heard the

sermon on the mount would be obliged to confess, that, as "none spoke such words as this man," so also none did such works.

The verses we have now read contain three great miracles. A leper is healed with a touch. A palsied person is made well by a word. A woman sick with a fever is restored in a moment to health and strength. On the face of these three miracles, we may read three striking lessons. Let us examine them, and lay them to heart.

Let us learn, for one thing, how great is the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. LEPROSY is the most fearful disease by which man's body can be afflicted. He that has it is like one dead while he lives. It is a disease regarded by physicians as incurable. (2 Kings 5:7.) Yet Jesus says, "Be made clean, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed." To heal a person of the PALSY without even seeing him, by only speaking a word, is to do that which our minds cannot even conceive. Yet Jesus commands, and at once it is done. To give a woman, prostrate with a FEVER, not merely relief, but strength to do work in an instant, would baffle the skill of all the physicians on earth. Yet Jesus "touched" Peter's wife's mother, and "she arose, and served him." These are the doings of one that is Almighty. There is no escape from the conclusion. This was "the finger of God." (Exod. 8:19.)

Behold here a broad foundation for the faith of a Christian! We are told in the Gospel to come to Jesus, to believe on Jesus, to live the life of faith in Jesus. We are encouraged to lean on Him, to cast all our care on Him, to repose all the weight of our souls on Him. We may do so without fear. He can bear all. He is a strong rock. He is Almighty. It was a fine saying of an old saint, "my faith can sleep sound on no other pillow than Christ's omnipotence." He can give life to the dead. He can give power to the weak. He can "increase strength to those who have no might." Let us trust him, and not be afraid. The world is full of snares. Our hearts are weak. But with Jesus nothing is impossible

Let us learn, for another thing, the mercifulness and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The circumstances of the three cases we are now considering were all different. He heard the leper's pitiful cry, "Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean." He was told of the centurion's servant, but He never saw him. He saw Peter's wife's mother, "lying sick with a fever;" and we are not told that she spoke a word. Yet in each case the heart of the Lord Jesus was one and the same. In each case He was quick to show mercy, and ready to heal. Each poor sufferer was tenderly pitied, and each effectually relieved.

Behold here another strong foundation for our faith! Our great High Priest is very gracious. He can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He is never tired of doing us good. He knows that we are a weak and feeble people, in the midst of a weary and troublous world. He is as ready to bear with us, and help us, as He was 1800 years ago. It is as true of Him now as it was then, "He doesn't despise anyone." (Job 36:5.) No heart can feel for us so much as the heart of Christ.

Let us learn, in the last place, what a precious thing is the grace of faith. We know little about the centurion described in these verses. His name, his nation, his past history, are all hidden from us. But one thing we know, and that is, that he believed. "Lord," he says, "I'm not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed." He believed, let us remember, when Scribes and Pharisees were unbelievers. He believed, though a Gentile born, when Israel was blinded. And our Lord pronounced upon him the commendation, which has been read all over the world from that time to this, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."

Let us lay firm hold on this lesson. It deserves to be remembered. To believe Christ's power and willingness to help, and to make a practical use of our belief, is a rare and precious gift. Let us be ever thankful if we have it. To be willing to come to Jesus as helpless, lost sinners, and commit our souls into His hands is a mighty privilege. Let us ever bless God if this willingness is ours, for it is His gift. Such faith is better than all other gifts and knowledge in the world. Many a poor converted heathen, who knows nothing but that he is sick of sin, and trusts in Jesus, shall sit down in heaven, while many learned English scholars are rejected for evermore. Blessed indeed are those who believe!

What do we each know of this faith? This is the great question. Our learning may be small--but do we believe? Our opportunities of giving and working for Christ's cause may be few--but do we believe? We may neither be able to preach, nor write, nor argue for the Gospel--but do we believe? May we never rest until we can answer this inquiry! Faith in Christ appears a small and simple thing to the children of this world. They see in it nothing great or grand. But faith in Christ is most precious in God's sight, and like most precious things, is rare. By it true Christians live. By it they stand. By it they overcome the world. Without this faith no one can be saved.

8:18-34. The King's power over nature

MATTHEW 8:16-27

When evening came, they brought to him many possessed with demons. He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases." Now when Jesus saw great multitudes around him, he gave the order to depart to the other side.

A scribe came, and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father."

But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

When he got into a boat, his disciples followed him. Behold, a violent storm came up on the sea, so much that the boat was covered with the waves, but he was asleep. They came to him, and woke him up, saying, "Save us, Lord! We are dying!"

He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then he got up, rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm.

The men marveled, saying, "What kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

In the first part of these verses we see a striking example of our Lord's wisdom in dealing with those who professed a willingness to be His disciples. The passage throws so much light on a subject frequently misunderstood in these days, that it deserves more than ordinary attention.

A certain scribe offers to follow our Lord wherever He goes. It was a remarkable offer, when we consider the class to which the man belonged, and the time at which it was made. But the offer receives a remarkable answer. It is not directly accepted, nor yet flatly rejected. Our Lord only makes the solemn

reply, "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

Another follower of our Lord next comes forward, and asks to be allowed to "bury his father," before going any further in the path of a disciple. The request seems, at first sight, a natural and lawful one. But it draws from our Lord's lips a reply no less solemn than that already referred to, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead."

There is something deeply impressive in both these sayings. They ought to be well weighed by all professing Christians. They teach us plainly, that people who show a desire to come forward and profess themselves true disciples of Christ, should be warned plainly to "count the cost," before they begin. Are they prepared to endure hardship? Are they ready to carry the cross? If not, they are not yet fit to begin. They teach us plainly that there are times when a Christian must literally give up all for Christ's sake, and when even such duties as attending to a parent's funeral must be left to be performed by others. Such duties some will always be ready to attend to; and at no time can they be put in comparison with the greater duty of preaching the Gospel, and doing Christ's work in the world.

It would be well for the churches of Christ, if these sayings of our Lord were more remembered than they are. It may well be feared, that the lesson they contain is too often overlooked by the ministers of the Gospel, and that thousands are admitted to full communion, who are never warned to "count the cost." Nothing, in fact, has done more harm to Christianity than the practice of filling the ranks of Christ's army with every volunteer who is willing to make a little profession, and talk fluently of his experience. It has been painfully forgotten that numbers alone do not make strength, and that there may be a great quantity of mere outward religion, while there is very little real grace. Let us all remember this. Let us keep back nothing from young professors and inquirers after Christ. Let us not enlist them on false pretenses. Let us tell them plainly that there is a crown of glory at the end. But let us tell them no less plainly, that there is a daily cross in the way.

In the latter part of these verses we learn, that true saving faith is often mingled with much weakness and infirmity. It is a humbling lesson, but a very wholesome one.

We are told of our Lord and His disciples crossing the sea of Galilee in a boat. A storm arises, and the boat is in danger of being filled with water, by the waves that beat over it. Meanwhile our Lord is asleep. The frightened disciples

awake Him, and cry to Him for help. He hears their cry and stills the waters with a word, so that there is "a great calm." At the same time, He gently reproves the anxiety of His disciples. "Why are you fearful, oh you of little faith!"

What a vivid picture we have here of the hearts of thousands of believers! How many have faith and love enough to forsake all for Christ's sake, and follow Him wherever He goes, and yet are full of fears in the hour of trial! How many have grace enough to turn to Jesus in every trouble, crying, "Lord save us," and yet not grace enough to lie still, and believe in the darkest hour that all is well! Truly believers have reason indeed to be "clothed with humility."

Let the prayer "Lord, increase our faith," always form part of our daily petitions. We never perhaps know the weakness of our faith, until we are placed in the furnace of trial and anxiety. Blessed and happy is that person who finds by experience that his faith can stand the fire, and that he can say with Job, "though he slays me, yet will I trust in him." (Job 13:15.)

We have great reason to thank God that Jesus, our great High-priest, is very compassionate and tender-hearted. He knows our frame. He considers our infirmities. He does not cast off His people because of defects. He pities even those whom he reproves. The prayer even of "little faith" is heard, and gets an answer.

MATTHEW 8:28-34

When he came to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, two people possessed by demons met him there, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that nobody could pass that way. Behold, they cried out, saying, "What do we have to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now there was a herd of many pigs feeding far away from them. The demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of pigs."

He said to them, "Go!"

They came out, and went into the herd of pigs: and behold, the whole herd of pigs rushed down the cliff into the sea, and died in the water.

Those who fed them fled, and went away into the city, and told everything, including what happened to those who were possessed with demons. Behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus. When they saw him, they begged that he would depart from their borders.

The subject of these seven verses is deep and mysterious. The casting out of a devil is here described with special fullness. It is one of those passages which throw strong light on a dark and difficult point.

Let us settle it firmly in our minds, that there is such a being as the devil. It is an dreadful truth, and one too much overlooked. There is an unseen spirit ever near us, of mighty power, and full of endless malice against our souls. From the beginning of creation he has laboured to injure man. Until the Lord comes the second time and binds him, he will never cease to tempt, and practice mischief. In the days when our Lord was upon earth, it is clear that he had a peculiar power over the bodies of certain men and women, as well as over their souls. Even in our own times there may be more of this bodily possession than some suppose, though confessedly in far less degree than when Christ came in the flesh. But that the devil is ever near us in spirit, and ever ready to ply our hearts with temptations, ought never to be forgotten.

Let us, in the next place, settle it firmly in our minds, that the power of the devil is limited. Mighty as he is, there is one mightier still. Keenly set as his will is on doing harm in the world, he can only work by permission. These very verses show us that the evil spirits know they can only go to and fro, and ravage the earth, until the time allowed them by the Lord of lords. "Have you come down here to torment us," they say, "before the time?" Their very petition shows us that they could not even hurt one of the Gergesene swine, unless Jesus the Son of God allowed them. "Permit us," they say, "to go away into the herd of pigs."

Let us, in the next place, settle it in our minds, that our Lord Jesus Christ is man's great deliverer from the power of the devil. He can redeem us not only "from all iniquity," and "this present evil world," but from the devil. It was prophesied of old that he should bruise the serpent's head. He began to bruise that head, when he was born of the Virgin Mary. He triumphed over that head when He died upon the cross. He showed His complete dominion over Satan, by "healing all who were oppressed by the devil," when He was upon earth. (Acts 10:38.) Our great remedy in all the assaults of the devil, is to cry to the Lord Jesus, and to seek His help. He can break the chains that Satan casts round us, and set us free. He can cast out every devil that plagues our hearts, as surely as in the days of old. It would be miserable indeed to know that there is a devil ever near us, if we did not also know that Christ was "able to save to the uttermost, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for us." (Heb. 7:25.)

Let us not leave this passage without observing the painful worldliness of the Gergesenes, among whom this miracle of casting out a devil was wrought. They

besought the Lord Jesus to "depart from their borders." They had no heart to feel for anything but the loss of their swine. They cared not that two fellow-creatures, with immortal souls, were freed from Satan's bondage. They cared not that there stood among them a greater than the devil, Jesus the Son of God. They cared for nothing but that their swine were drowned, and "the hope of their gains gone." They ignorantly regarded Jesus as one who stood between them and their profits, and they only wished to be rid of Him.

There are only too many like these Gergesenes. There are thousands who care not one jot for Christ, or Satan, so long as they can make a little more money, and have a little more of the good things of this world. From this spirit may we be delivered! Against this spirit may we ever watch and pray! It is very common. It is awfully infectious. Let us recollect every morning that we have souls to be saved, and that we shall one day die, and after that be judged. Let us beware of loving the world more than Christ. Let us beware of hindering the salvation of others, because we fear the increase of true religion may diminish our gains, or give us trouble.

Chapter 9

9:1-38. The King’s power to forgive sin and other signs

MATTHEW 9:1-13

He entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his own city. Behold, they brought to him a man who was paralyzed, lying on a bed. Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, "Son, cheer up! Your sins are forgiven you."

Behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man blasphemes."

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven;' or to say, 'Get up, and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ “ (then he said to the paralytic), "Get up, and take up your mat, and go up to your house."

He arose and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

As Jesus passed by from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax collection office. He said to him, "Follow me." He got up and followed him. It happened as he sat in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came

and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

When Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do. But you go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Let us notice in the first part of this passage, our Lord's knowledge of men's thoughts. There were certain of the scribes, who found fault with the words which Jesus spoke to a man sick of the palsy. They said secretly among themselves, "this man blasphemes." They probably supposed that no one knew what was going on in their minds. They had yet to learn that the Son of God could read hearts, and discern spirits. Their malicious thought was publicly exposed. They were put to an open shame.

There is an important lesson for us in this. "All things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13.) Nothing can be concealed from Christ. What do we think of, in private, when no man sees us? What do we think of, in church, when we seem so grave and serious? What are we thinking of at this moment, while these words pass under our eyes? Jesus knows. Jesus sees. Jesus records. Jesus will one day call us to give account. It is written that "God will judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ." (Rom. 2:16.) Surely we ought to be very humble when we consider these things. We ought to thank God daily that the blood of Christ can cleanse from all sin. We ought often to cry, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight." (Psalm 19:14.)

Let us notice in the second place, the wonderful call of the apostle Matthew to be Christ's disciple.

We find the man, who afterwards was the first to write a Gospel, sitting at the tax collector's booth. We see him absorbed in his worldly calling, and possibly thinking of nothing but money and gain. But suddenly the Lord Jesus calls on him to follow Him, and become His disciple. At once Matthew obeys. He "makes haste, and delays not" to keep Christ's commandment. (Psalm. 119:60.) He arises and follows Him.

Let it be a fixed principle in our religion, that with Christ nothing is impossible. He can take a tax collector, and make him an apostle. He can change any heart, and make all things new. Let us never despair of any one's salvation. Let us pray on, and speak on, and work on to do good to souls, even to the souls

of the worst. "The voice of the Lord is powerful." (Psalm. 29:4.) When He says by the power of the Spirit, "follow me," He can make the hardest and most sinful obey.

Let us observe Matthew's decision. He waited for nothing. He did not tarry for "a convenient time." (Acts 24:25.) And he reaped in consequence a great reward. He wrote a book, which is known all over the earth. He became a blessing to others, as well as blessed in his own soul. He left a name behind him, which is better known than the names of princes and kings. The richest man of the world is soon forgotten when he dies. But as long as the world stands, millions will know the name of Matthew the tax collector.

Let us notice, in the last place, our Lord's precious declaration about His own mission. The Pharisees found fault with Him, because He allowed publicans and sinners to be in His Company. In their proud blindness they fancied, that a teacher sent from heaven ought to have no dealings with such people. They were wholly ignorant of the grand design for which the Messiah was to come into the world--to be a Saviour, a Physician, a healer of sin-sick souls. And they drew from our Lord's lips a rebuke, accompanied by the blessed words, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Let us make sure that we thoroughly understand the doctrine that these words contain. The first thing needful, in order to have an interest in Christ, is to feel deeply our own corruption, and to be willing to come to Him for deliverance. We are not to keep away from Christ, as many ignorantly do, because we feel bad, and wicked, and unworthy. We are to remember that sinners are those He came into the world to save, and that if we feel ourselves such, it is well. Happy is he who really comprehends that one principal qualification for coming to Christ is a deep sense of sin!

Finally, if by the grace of God we really understand the glorious truth that sinners are those whom Christ came to call, let us take heed that we never forget it. Let us not dream that true Christians can ever attain such a state of perfection is this world, as not to need the mediation and intercession of Jesus. Sinners we are in the day we first come to Christ. Poor needy sinners we continue to be so long as we live, drawing all the grace we have every hour out of Christ's fullness. Sinners we shall find ourselves in the hour of our death, and shall die as much indebted to Christ's blood, as in the day we first believed.

MATTHEW 9:14-26

Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast?"

Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch would tear away from the garment, and a worse hole is made. Neither do people put new wine into old wineskins, or else the skins would burst, and the wine be spilled, and the skins ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

While he told these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

Jesus got up and followed him, as did his disciples. Behold, a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years came behind him, and touched the fringe of his garment; for she said within herself, "If I just touch his garment, I will be made well."

But Jesus, turning around and seeing her, said, "Daughter, cheer up! Your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour.

When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players, and the crowd in noisy disorder, he said to them, "Make room, because the girl isn't dead, but sleeping."

They were ridiculing him.

But when the crowd was put out, he entered in, took her by the hand, and the girl arose. The report of this went out into all that land.

Let us mark in this passage, the gracious name by which the Lord Jesus speaks of Himself. He calls Himself "the bridegroom."

What the bridegroom is to the bride, the Lord Jesus is to the souls of all who believe in Him. He loves them with a deep and everlasting love. He takes them into union with Himself. They are "one with Christ and Christ in them." He pays all their debts to God. He supplies all their daily need. He sympathizes with them in all their troubles. He bears with all their infirmities, and does not reject them for a few weaknesses. He regards them as part of Himself. Those that

persecute and injure them are persecuting Him. The glory that He has received from His Father they will one day share with Him, and where He is, there shall they be. Such are the privileges of all true Christians. They are the Lamb's wife. (Rev. 19:7.) Such is the portion to which faith admits us. By it God joins our poor sinful souls to one precious Husband; and those whom God thus joins together, shall never be put asunder. Blessed indeed are those who believe!

Let us mark, in the next place, what a wise principle the Lord Jesus lays down for the treatment of young disciples. There were some who found fault with our Lord's followers, because they did not fast as John the Baptist's disciples did. Our Lord defends His disciples with an argument full of deep wisdom. He shows that there would be a lack of fitness in their fasting, so long as He, their Bridegroom, was with them. But He does not stop there. He goes on to show, by two parables, that young beginners in the school of Christianity must be dealt with gently. They must be taught as they are able to bear. They must not be expected to receive everything at once. To neglect this rule would be as unwise as to "put new wine into old bottles," or to put "a piece of new cloth to an old garment."

There is a mine of deep wisdom in this, which all would do well to remember, in the spiritual teaching of those who are young in experience. We must be careful not to attach an excessive importance to the lesser things of religion. We must not be in a hurry to require a minute conformity to one rigid rule in 'things indifferent', until the first principles of repentance and faith have been thoroughly learned. To guide us in this matter, we have great need to pray for grace, and Christian common sense. Tact in dealing with young disciples is a rare gift, but a very useful one. To know what to insist upon as absolutely necessary from the first--and what to reserve, as a lesson to be learned when the learner has come to more perfect knowledge--is one of the highest attainments of a teacher of souls.

Let us mark, in the next place, what encouragement our Lord gives to the humblest faith. We read in this passage, that a woman severely afflicted with disease, came behind our Lord in the crowd, and "touched the hem" of His garment, in the hope that by so doing she should be healed. She said not a word to obtain help. She made no public confession of faith. But she had confidence, that if she could only "touch His garment," she would be made well. And so it was. There lay hidden in that act of hers, a seed of precious faith, which obtained our Lord's commendation. She was made whole at once, and returned home in peace. To use the words of a good old writer, "She came trembling, and went back triumphing."

Let us store up in our minds this history. It may perhaps help us mightily in some hour of need. Our faith may be feeble. Our courage may be small. Our grasp of the Gospel, and its promises, may be weak and trembling. But, after all, the grand question is, do we really trust in Christ alone? Do we look to Jesus, and only to Jesus, for pardon and peace? If this be so, it is well. If we may not touch His garment, we can touch His heart. Such faith saves the soul. Weak faith is less comfortable than strong faith. Weak faith will carry us to heaven with far less joy than full assurance. But weak faith gives an interest in Christ as surely as strong faith. He that only touches the hem of Christ's garment shall never perish.

In the last place, let us mark in this passage, our Lord's almighty power. He restores to life one that was dead. How wonderful that sight must have been! Who that has ever seen the dead, can forget the stillness, the silence, the coldness, when the breath has left the body? Who can forget the dreadful feeling, that a mighty change has taken place, and a mighty gulf been placed between ourselves and the departed? But behold! our Lord goes to the chamber where the dead lies, and calls the spirit back to its earthly tabernacle. The pulse once more beats. The eyes once more see. The breath once more comes and goes. The ruler's daughter is once more alive, and restored to her father and mother. This was omnipotence indeed! None could have done this but He who first created man, and has all power in heaven and earth.

This is the kind of truth we never can know too well. The more clearly we see Christ's power, the more likely we are to realize Gospel peace. Our position may be trying. Our hearts may be weak. The world may be difficult to journey through. Our faith may seem too small to carry us home. But let us take courage, when we think on Jesus, and not be cast down. Greater is He that is for us, than all those who are against us. Our Saviour can raise the dead. Our Savior is almighty.

MATTHEW 9:27-38

As Jesus passed by from there, two blind men followed him, calling out and saying, "Have mercy on us, son of David!"

When he had come into the house, the blind men came to him. Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

They told him, "Yes, Lord."

Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." Their eyes were opened. Jesus strictly charged them, saying, "See that no

one knows about this." But they went out and spread abroad his fame in all that land.

As they went out, behold, a mute man who was demon possessed was brought to him. When the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke. The multitudes marveled, saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!"

But the Pharisees said, "By the prince of the demons, he casts out demons."

Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send out labourers into his harvest."

There are four lessons in this passage, which deserve close attention. Let us mark them each in succession.

Let us mark, in the first place, that strong faith in Christ may sometimes be found where it might least have been expected. Who would have thought that two blind men would have called our Lord the "Son of David?" They could not, of course, have seen the miracles that He did. They could only know Him by common report. But the eyes of their understanding were enlightened, if their bodily eyes were dark. They saw the truth which Scribes and Pharisees could not see. They saw that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. They believed that He was able to heal them.

An example like this shows us, that we must never despair of any one's salvation, merely because he lives in a position unfavorable to his soul. Grace is stronger than circumstances. The life of religion does not depend merely upon outward advantages. The Holy Spirit can give faith, and keep faith in active exercise without book-learning, without money, and with scanty means of grace. Without the Holy Spirit a man may know all mysteries, and live in the full blaze of the Gospel, and yet be lost. We shall see many strange sights at the last day. Poor cottagers will be found to have believed in the Son of David, while rich men, full of university learning, will prove to have lived and died like the Pharisees, in hardened unbelief. Many that are last will be first, and the first last. (Matt. 20:16.)

Let us mark, in the next place, that our Lord Jesus Christ has had great experience of disease and sickness. He "went about all the cities and villages" doing good.

He was an eye-witness of all the ills that flesh is heir to. He saw ailments of every kind, sort, and description. He was brought in contact with every form of bodily suffering. None were too loathsome for Him to attend to. None were too frightful for Him to cure. He was a healer of every "sickness and every disease."

There is much comfort to be drawn from this fact. We are each dwelling in a poor frail body. We never know what quantity of suffering we may have to watch, as we sit by the bedside of dear relations and friends. We never know what racking complaint we ourselves may have to submit to, before we lie down and die. But let us arm ourselves betimes with the precious thought that Jesus is specially fitted to be the sick man's friend. That great high-priest to whom we must apply for pardon and peace with God, is eminently qualified to sympathize with an aching body, as well as to heal an ailing conscience. The eyes of Him who is King of kings used often to look with pity on the diseased. The world cares little for the sick, and often keeps aloof from them. But the Lord Jesus cares specially for the sick. He is the first to visit them, and say, "I stand at the door and knock." Happy are they who hear His voice, and let Him in!

Let us mark, in the next place, our Lord's tender concern for neglected souls. "He saw multitudes" of people when He was on earth, scattered about "like sheep having no shepherd," and He was moved with compassion. He saw them neglected by those who, for the time, ought to have been teachers. He saw them ignorant, hopeless, helpless, dying, and unfit to die. The sight moved Him to deep pity. That loving heart could not see such things, and not feel.

Now what are our feelings when we see such a sight? This is the question that should arise in our minds. There are many such to be seen on every side. There are millions of idolaters and heathen on earth--millions of deluded Muhammadans--millions of superstitious Roman Catholics. There are thousands of unsaved Protestants near our own doors. Do we feel tenderly concerned about their souls? Do we deeply pity their spiritual destitution? Do we long to see that destitution relieved? These are serious inquiries, and ought to be answered. It is easy to sneer at missions to the heathen, and those who work for them. But the man who does not feel for the souls of all unconverted people, can surely not have "the mind of Christ." (1 Cor. 2:16.)

Let us mark, in the last place, that there is a solemn duty incumbent on all Christians, who would do good to the unconverted part of the world. They are to

pray for more men to be raised up to work for the conversion of souls. It seems as if it was to be a daily part of our prayers. "Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send forth labourers into his harvest."

If we know anything of prayer, let us make it a point of conscience never to forget this solemn charge of our Lord's. Let us settle it in our minds, that it is one of the surest ways of doing good, and stemming evil. Personal working for souls is good. Giving money is good. But praying is best of all. By prayer we reach Him without whom work and money are alike in vain. We obtain the aid of the Holy Spirit. Money can hire workers. Universities can give learning. Congregations may elect. Bishops may ordain. But the Holy Spirit alone can make ministers of the Gospel, and raise up lay workmen in the spiritual harvest, who need not be ashamed. Never, never may we forget that if we would do good to the world, our first duty is to pray!

Chapter 10

10.The King’s ambassadors

MATTHEW 10:1-15. The Twelve and their commission

He called to himself his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these. The first, Simon, who is called Peter; Andrew, his brother; James the son of Zebedee; John, his brother; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

Jesus sent these twelve out, and charged them, saying, "Don't go among the Gentiles, and don't enter into any city of the Samaritans. Rather, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, preach, saying, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. Freely you received, so freely give. Don't take any gold, nor silver, nor brass in your money belts. Take no bag for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff: for the labourer is worthy of his food. Into whatever city or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy; and stay there until you go on. As you enter into the household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come on it, but if it isn't worthy, let your peace return to you. Whoever doesn't receive you, nor hear your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust from your feet. Most certainly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city.

This chapter is one of peculiar solemnity. Here is the record of the first ordination which ever took place in the church of Christ. The Lord Jesus chooses and sends forth the twelve apostles. Here is an account of the first charge ever delivered to newly ordained Christian ministers. The Lord Jesus Himself delivers it. Never was there so important an ordination. Never was there so solemn a charge!

There are three lessons which stand out prominently on the face of the first fifteen verses of this chapter. Let us take them in order.

We are taught, in the first place, that all ministers are not necessarily saved men. We see our Lord choosing a Judas Iscariot to be one of His apostles. We cannot doubt that He who knew all hearts, knew well the characters of the men whom He chose. And He includes in the list of apostles one who was a traitor!

We shall do well to bear in mind this fact. Ordination does not confer the saving grace of the Holy Spirit. Ordained men are not necessarily converted. We are not to regard them as infallible, either in doctrine or in practice. We are not to make popes or idols of them, and insensibly put them in Christ's place. We are to regard them as "men of like passions" with ourselves, liable to the same infirmities, and daily requiring the same grace. We are not to think it impossible for them to do very bad things, or to expect them to be above the reach of harm from flattery, covetousness, and the world. We are to prove their teaching by the word of God, and follow them so far as they follow Christ, but no further. Above all, we ought to pray for them, that they may be successors not of Judas Iscariot, but of James and John. It is an dreadful thing to be a minister of the Gospel! Ministers need many prayers.

We are taught, in the next place, that the great work of a minister of Christ is to do good. He is sent to seek "lost sheep,"--to proclaim glad tidings--to relieve those who are suffering--to diminish sorrow--and to increase joy. His life is meant to be one of "giving," rather than receiving.

This is a high standard, and a very peculiar one. Let it be well weighed, and carefully examined. It is plain, for one thing, that the life of a faithful minister of Christ cannot be one of ease. He must be ready to spend body and mind, time and strength, in the work of His calling. Laziness and frivolity are bad enough in any profession, but worst of all in that of a watchman for souls. It is plain, for another thing, that the position of the ministers of Christ is not that which ignorant people sometimes ascribe to them, and which they unhappily sometimes claim for themselves. They are not so much ordained to rule as to serve. They are not intended so much to have dominion over the Church, as to

supply its needs, and serve its members. (2 Cor. 1:24.) Happy would it be for the cause of true religion, if these things were better understood! Half the diseases of Christianity have arisen from mistaken notions about the pastor's office!

We are taught, in the last place, that it is a most dangerous thing to neglect the offers of the Gospel. It shall prove "more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah" in the judgment day, than for those who have heard Christ's truth, and not received it.

This is a doctrine fearfully overlooked, and one that deserves serious consideration. Men are sadly apt to forget, that it does not require great open sins to be sinned, in order to ruin a soul forever. They have only to go on hearing without believing, listening without repenting, going to Church without going to Christ, and by and bye they will find themselves in hell! We shall all be judged according to our light. We shall have to give account of our use of religious privileges. To hear of the "great salvation," and yet neglect it, is one of the worst sins man can commit. (John 16:9.)

What are we doing ourselves with the Gospel? This is the question which everyone who reads this passage should put to his conscience. Let us assume that we are decent and respectable in our lives, correct and moral in all the relations of life, regular in our formal attendance on the means of grace. It is all well, so far as it goes. But is this all that can be said of us? Are we really receiving the love of the truth? Is Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith? If not, we are in fearful danger. We are far more guilty than the men of Sodom, who never heard the Gospel at all. We may awake to find, that in spite of our regularity, and morality, and correctness, we have lost our souls for all eternity. It will not save us to have lived in the full sunshine of Christian privileges, and to have heard the Gospel faithfully preached every week. There must be experimental acquaintance with Christ. There must be personal reception of His truth. There must be vital union with Him. We must become his servants and disciples. Without this, the preaching of the Gospel only adds to our responsibility, increases our guilt, and will at length sink us more deeply into hell. These are hard sayings. But the words of Scripture, which we have read, are plain and unmistakable. They are all true.

Verses 16-24. Resumption of the commission

MATTHEW 10:16-23

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up

to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you. Yes, and you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the nations. But when they deliver you up, don't be anxious how or what you will say, for it will be given you in that hour what you will say. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

"Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child. Children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all men for my name's sake, but he who endures to the end will be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next, for most certainly I tell you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man has come."

The truths contained in these verses should be pondered by all who try to do good in the world. To the selfish man, who cares for nothing but his own ease or comfort, there may seem to be little in them. To the minister of the Gospel, and to everyone who seeks to save souls, these verses ought to be full of interest. No doubt there is much in them, which applies specially to the days of the apostles. But there is much also which applies to all times.

We see, for one thing, that those who would do good to souls, must be moderate in their expectations. They must not think that universal success will attend their labours. They must reckon on meeting with much opposition. They must make up their minds to "be hated," persecuted, and ill-used, and that too by their nearest relations. They will often find themselves like "sheep in the midst of wolves."

Let us bear this in mind continually. Whether we preach, or teach, or visit from house to house--whether we write or give counsel, or whatever we do, let it be a settled principle with us not to expect more than Scripture and experience warrant. Human nature is far more wicked and corrupt than we think. The power of evil is far greater than we suppose. It is vain to imagine that everybody will see what is good for them, and believe what we tell them. It is expecting what we shall not find, and will only end in disappointment. Happy is that laborer for Christ, who knows these things at his first starting, and has not to learn them by biter experience! Here lies the secret cause why many have turned back, who once seemed full of zeal to do good. They began with extravagant expectations. They did not count the cost. They fell into the mistake of the great German Reformer, who confessed he forgot at one time, that "old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon."

We see, for another thing, that those who would do good have need to pray for wisdom, good sense, and a sound mind. Our Lord tells his disciples to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." He tells those who when they are persecuted in one place, they may lawfully "flee to another."

There are few of our Lord's instructions which it is so difficult to use rightly as this. There is a line marked out for us between two extremes; but one that it requires great judgment to define. To avoid persecution by holding our tongues, and keeping our religion entirely to ourselves, is one extreme. We are not to err in that direction. To court persecution, and thrust our religion upon every one we meet, without regard to place, time, or circumstances, is another extreme. In this direction also we are warned not to err any more than in the other. Truly we may say, "who is sufficient for these things?" We have need to cry to the only wise God for wisdom.

The extreme into which most men are liable to fall in the present day, is that of silence, cowardice, and letting others alone. Our so-called prudence is apt to degenerate into a compromising line of conduct, or downright unfaithfulness. We are only too ready to suppose that it is of no use trying to do good to certain people. We excuse ourselves from efforts to benefit their souls, by saying it would be indiscreet, or inexpedient, or would give needless offence, or would even do positive harm. Let us all watch and be on our guard against this spirit. Laziness and the devil are often the true explanation of it. To give way to it is pleasant to flesh and blood, no doubt, and saves us much trouble. But those who give way to it often throw away great opportunities of usefulness.

On the other hand, it is impossible to deny that there is such a thing as a righteous and holy zeal, which is "not according to knowledge." It is quite possible to create much needless offence, commit great blunders, and stir up much opposition, which might have been avoided by a little prudence, wise management, and exercise of judgment. Let us all take heed that we are not guilty in this respect. We may be sure there is such a thing as Christian wisdom, which is quite distinct from Jesuitical deception, or carnal policy. This wisdom let us seek. Our Lord Jesus does not require us to throw aside our common sense, when we undertake to work for Him. There will be offence enough connected with our religion, do what we will; but let us not increase it without cause, Let us strive to "watch carefully how we walk, not as unwise, but as wise." (Ephes. 5:15.)

It is to be feared, that believers in the Lord Jesus do not sufficiently pray for the spirit of knowledge, judgment, and a sound mind. They are apt to fancy that if they have grace, they have all they need. They forget that a gracious heart

should pray that it may be full of wisdom, as well as of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 6:3.) Let us all remember this. Great grace and common sense are perhaps one of the rarest combinations. That they may go together, the life of David, and the ministry of the apostle Paul are striking proofs. In this, however, as in every other respect, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is our most perfect example. None were ever so faithful as He. But none were ever so truly wise. Let us make Him our pattern, and walk in His steps.

MATTHEW 10:24-33

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more those of his household! Therefore don't be afraid of them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed; and hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in the ear, proclaim on the housetops. Don't be afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.

"Aren't two sparrows sold for an assarion coin? Not one of them falls on the ground apart from your Father's will, but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore don't be afraid. You are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone therefore who confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.

To do good to souls in this world is very hard. All who try it find out this by experience. It needs a large stock of courage, faith, patience, and perseverance. Satan will fight vigorously to maintain his kingdom. Human nature is desperately wicked. To do harm is easy. To do good is hard.

The Lord Jesus knew this well, when He sent forth His disciples to preach the Gospel for the first time. He knew what was before them, if they did not. He took care to supply them with a list of encouragements, in order to cheer them when they felt cast down. Weary missionaries abroad, or fainting ministers at home--disheartened teachers of schools, and desponding visitors of districts, would do well to study often the nine verses we have just read. Let us mark what they contain.

Those who try to do good to souls must not expect to fare better than their great Master. "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his

master." The Lord Jesus was slandered and rejected by those whom he came to benefit. There was no error in His teaching. There was no defect in His method of imparting instruction. Yet many hated Him, and "called Him Beelzebub." Few believed Him, and cared for what He said. Surely we have no right to be surprised if we, whose best efforts are mingled with much imperfection, are treated in the same way as Christ. If we let the world alone, it will probably let us alone. But if we try to do it spiritual good, it will hate us as it did our Master.

Those who try to do good must look forward with patience to the day of judgment. "There is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known." They must be content in this present world to be misunderstood, misrepresented, vilified, slandered, and abused. They must not cease to work because their motives are mistaken, and their characters fiercely assailed. They must remember continually that all will be set right at the last day. The secrets of all hearts shall then be revealed. "He will make your righteousness go forth as the light, and your justice as the noon day sun." (Psalm. 37:6.) The purity of their intentions, the wisdom of their labors, and the rightfulness of their cause, shall at length be made manifest to all the world. Let us work on steadily and quietly. Men may not understand us, and may vehemently oppose us. But the day of judgment draws near. We shall be righted at last. The Lord, when He comes again, "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then shall each man will get his praise from God." (1 Cor. 4:5.)

Those who try to do good must fear God more than man. Man can hurt the body, but there his enmity must stop. He can go no further. God "is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." We may be threatened with the loss of character, property, and all that makes life enjoyable, if we go on in the path of Christian duty. We must not heed such threats, when our course is plain. Like Daniel and the three Hebrew children, we must submit to anything rather than displease God, and wound our consciences. The anger of man may be hard to bear, but the anger of God is much harder. The fear of man does indeed bring a snare, but we must make it give way to the expulsive power of a stronger principle--even the fear of God. It was a fine saying of good Colonel Gardiner's, "I fear God, and therefore there is none else that I need fear."

Those who try to do good must keep before their minds the providential care of God over them. Nothing can happen in this world without His permission. There is no such thing in reality as chance, accident, or luck. "The very hairs of their heads are all numbered." The path of duty may sometimes lead them into great danger. Health and life may seem to be periled, if they go forward. Let them take comfort in the thought that all around them is in God's hand. Their

bodies, their souls, their characters are all in His safe keeping. No disease can seize them--no hand can hurt them, unless He allows. They may say boldly to every fearful thing they meet with, "You could have no power at all against me, unless it were given to you from above."

In the last place, those who try to do good should continually remember the day when they will meet their Lord to receive their final portion. If they would have Him own them, and confess them before His Father's throne, they must not be ashamed to own and "confess Him" before the men of this world. To do it may cost us much. It may bring on us laughter, mockery, persecution, and scorn. But let us not be laughed out of heaven. Let us recollect the great and dreadful day of account, and not be afraid to show men that we love Christ, and want them to know and love Him also.

Let these encouragements be treasured up in the hearts of all who labor in Christ's cause, whatever their position may be. The Lord knows their trials, and has spoken these things for their comfort. He cares for all His believing people, but for none so much as those who work for His cause, and try to do good. May we seek to be of that number. Every believer may do something if he tries. There is always something for everyone to do. May we each have an eye to see it, and a will to do it.

MATTHEW 10:34-42

"Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me isn't worthy of me. He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me. He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward: and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, most certainly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward."

In these verses the great Head of the Church winds up His first charge to those whom He sends forth to make known His Gospel. He declares three great truths, which form a fitting conclusion to the whole discourse.

In the first place, He bids us remember that His Gospel will not cause peace and agreement wherever it comes. "I didn't come to send peace, but a sword." The object of His first coming on earth was not to set up a millennial kingdom in which all would be of one mind, but to bring in the Gospel, which would lead to strifes and divisions. We have no right to be surprised, if we see this continually fulfilled. We are not to think it strange, if the Gospel rends asunder families, and causes estrangement between the nearest relations. It is sure to do so in many cases, because of the deep corruption of man's heart. So long as one man believes, and another remains unbelieving--so long as one is resolved to keep his sins, and another desirous to give them up, the result of the preaching of the Gospel must needs be division. For this the Gospel is not to blame, but the heart of man.

There is a deep truth in all this, which is constantly forgotten and overlooked. Many talk vaguely about unity, and harmony, and peace in the Church of Christ, as if they were things that we ought always to expect, and for the sake of which everything ought to be sacrificed. Such people would do well to remember the words of our Lord. No doubt unity and peace are mighty blessings. We ought to seek them, pray for them, and give up everything in order to obtain them, excepting truth and a good conscience. But it is an idle dream to suppose that the churches of Christ will enjoy much of unity and peace before the millennium comes.

In the second place, our Lord tells us that true Christians must make up their minds to trouble in this world. Whether we are ministers or hearers, whether we teach or are taught, it makes little difference. We must carry "a cross." We must be content to lose even life itself for Christ's sake. We must submit to the loss of man's favour, we must endure hardships, we must deny ourselves in many things, or we shall never reach heaven at last. So long as the world, the devil, and our own hearts, are what they are, these things must be so.

We shall find it most useful to remember this lesson ourselves, and to impress it upon others. Few things do so much harm in religion as exaggerated expectations. People look for a degree of worldly comfort in Christ's service which they have no right to expect, and not finding what they look for, are tempted to give up religion in disgust. Happy is he who thoroughly understands, that though Christianity holds out a crown in the end, it brings also a cross in the way.

In the last place, our Lord cheers us by saying that the least service done to those who work in His cause is observed and rewarded of God. He that gives a

believer so little as "a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, will in no way lose his reward."

There is something very beautiful in this promise. It teaches us that the eyes of the great Master are ever upon those who labour for him, and try to do good. They seem perhaps to work on unnoticed and unregarded. The proceedings of preachers, and missionaries, and teachers, and visitors of the poor, may appear very trifling and insignificant, compared to the movements of kings and parliaments, of armies and of statesmen. But they are not insignificant in the eyes of God. He takes notice who opposes His servants, and who helps them. He observes who is kind to them, as Lydia was to Paul--and who throws difficulties in their way, as Diotrephes did to John. All their daily experience is recorded, as they labor on in His harvest. All is written down in the great book of His remembrance, and will be brought to light at the last day. The chief butler forgot Joseph, when he was restored to his place. But the Lord Jesus never forgets any of His people. He will say to many who little expect it, in the resurrection morning, "I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink." (Matt. 25:35.)

Let us ask ourselves, as we close the chapter, in what light we regard Christ's work and Christ's cause in the world? Are we helpers of it, or hinderers? Do we in anyway aid the Lord's "prophets," and "righteous men?" Do we assist His "little ones?" Do we impede His laborers, or do we cheer them on? These are serious questions. They do well and wisely who give the "cup of cold water," whenever they have opportunity. They do better still who work actively in the Lord's vineyard. May we all strive to leave the world a better world than it was when we were born! This is to have the mind of Christ. This is to find out the value of the lessons this wonderful chapter contains.

Chapter 11

Verses 1-19. John the Baptist rejected

MATTHEW 11:1-15

It happened that when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. Now when John heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to him, "Are you he who comes, or should we look for another?"

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf

hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. Blessed is he who finds no occasion for stumbling in me."

As these went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in king's houses. But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' Most certainly I tell you, among those who are born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptizer; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptizer until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. If you are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

The first thing that demands our attention in this passage, is the message which John the Baptist sends to our Lord Jesus Christ. He "sent two of his disciples and said to him, "Are you he who comes, or should we look for another?"

This question did not arise from doubt or unbelief on the part of John. We do that holy man injustice, if we interpret it in such a way. It was put for the benefit of his disciples. It was meant to give them an opportunity of hearing from Christ's own lips, the evidence of His divine mission. No doubt John the Baptist felt that his own ministry was ended. Something within him told him that he would never come forth from Herod's prison-house, but would surely die. He remembered the ignorant jealousies that had already been shown by his disciples towards the disciples of Christ. He took the most likely course to dispel those jealousies forever. He sent his followers to "hear and see" for themselves.

The conduct of John the Baptist in this matter affords a striking example to ministers, teachers, and parents, when they draw near the end of their course. Their chief concern should be about the souls of those they are going to leave behind them. Their great desire should be to persuade them to cleave to Christ. The death of those who have guided and instructed us on earth ought always to have this effect. It should make us lay hold more firmly on Him who dies no more, "continues ever," and "has an unchangeable priesthood." (Heb. 7:24.)

The second thing that demands our notice in this passage, is the high testimony which our Lord bears to the character of John the Baptist. No mortal

man ever received such commendation as Jesus here bestows on His imprisoned friend. "Among those who are born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptizer." In time past John had boldly confessed Jesus before men, as the Lamb of God. Now Jesus openly declares John to be more than a prophet.

There were some, no doubt, who were disposed to think lightly of John Baptist, partly from ignorance of the nature of his ministry, partly from misunderstanding the question he had sent to ask. Our Lord Jesus silences such cavilers by the declaration he here makes. He tells them not to suppose that John was a timid, vacillating, unstable man, "a reed shaken by the wind." If they thought so, they were utterly mistaken. He was a bold, unflinching witness to the truth. He tells them not to suppose that John was at heart a worldly man, fond of king's courts, and delicate living. If they thought so, they greatly erred. He was a self-denying preacher of repentance, who would risk the anger of a king, rather than not reprove his sins. In short, He would have them know that John was "more than a prophet." He was one to whom God had given more honor than to all the Old Testament prophets. They indeed prophesied of Christ, but died without seeing Him. John not only prophesied of Him, but saw Him face to face. They foretold that the days of the Son of man would certainly come, and the Messiah appear. John was an actual eye-witness of those days, and an honored instrument in preparing men for them. To them it was given to predict that Messiah would be "led as a lamb to the slaughter," and "cut off." To John it was given to point to Him, and say, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

There is something very beautiful and comforting to true Christians in this testimony which our Lord bears to John. It shows us the tender interest which our great Head feels in the lives and characters of all His members. It shows us what honour He is ready to put on all the work and labor that they go through in His cause. It is a sweet foretaste of the confession which He will make of them before the assembled world, when He presents them faultless at the last day before His Father's throne.

Do we know what it is to work for Christ? Have we ever felt cast down and dispirited, as if we were doing no good, and no one cared for us? Are we ever tempted to feel, when laid aside by sickness, or withdrawn by providence, "I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nothing?" Let us meet such thoughts by the recollection of this passage. Let us remember, there is One who daily records all we do for Him, and sees more beauty in His servants' work than His servants do themselves. The same tongue which bore testimony to John in prison, will bear testimony to all his people at the last day. He will say, "Come,

blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And then shall His faithful witnesses discover, to their wonder and surprise, that there never was a word spoken on their Master's behalf, which does not receive a reward.

Verses 20-24. The King rejected

MATTHEW 11:16-24

"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call to their companions and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you didn't dance. We mourned for you, and you didn't lament.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

Then he began to denounce the cities in which most of his mighty works had been done, because they didn't repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. You, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, you will go down to Hades. For if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in you, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, on the day of judgment, than for you."

These sayings of the Lord Jesus were called forth by the state of the Jewish nation, when He was upon earth. But they speak loudly to us also, as well as to the Jews. They throw great light on some parts of the natural man's character. They teach us the perilous state of many immortal souls in the present day.

The first part of these verses shows us the unreasonableness of many unconverted men in the things of religion. The Jews, in our Lord's time, found fault with every teacher whom God sent among them. First came John the Baptist preaching repentance--an austere man, a man who withdrew himself from society, and lived an ascetic life. Did this satisfy the Jews? No! They found fault and said, "He has a devil." Then came Jesus the Son of God, preaching the Gospel, living as other men lived, and practicing none of John the Baptist's peculiar austerities. And did this satisfy the Jews? No! They found fault again, and said, "Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors

and sinners!" In short, they were as perverse and hard to please as 'contrary children'.

It is a mournful fact, that there are always thousands of professing Christians just as unreasonable as these Jews. They are equally perverse, and equally hard to please. Whatever we teach and preach, they find fault. Whatever be our manner of life, they are dissatisfied. Do we tell them of salvation by grace, and justification by faith? At once they cry out against our doctrine as licentious and antinomian. Do we tell them of the holiness which the Gospel requires? At once they exclaim, that we are too strict, and precise, and righteous overmuch. Are we cheerful? They accuse us of levity. Are we grave? They call us gloomy and sour. Do we keep aloof from balls, and races, and plays? They denounce us as puritanical, exclusive and narrow-minded. Do we eat, and drink, and dress like other people, and attend to our worldly callings and go into society? They sneeringly insinuate that they see no difference between us and those who make no religious profession at all, and that we are not better than other men. What is all this but the conduct of the Jews over again? "We played the flute for you, and you didn't dance. We mourned for you, and you didn't lament." He who spoke these words knew the hearts of men.

The plain truth is, that true believers must not expect unconverted men to be satisfied, either with their faith or their practice. If they do, they expect what they will not find. They must make up their minds to hear objections, cavils, and excuses, however holy their own lives may be. Well says Quesnel, "Whatever measures good men take, they will never escape the censures of the world. The best way is not to be concerned at them." After all, what says the Scripture? "The mind of the flesh is hostile towards God." "The natural man doesn't receive the things of God's Spirit." (Rom. 8:7. 1 Cor. 2:14.) This is the explanation of the whole matter.

The second part of these verses shows us the exceeding wickedness of wilful impenitence. Our Lord declares that it shall be "more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, in the day of judgment," than for those towns where people had heard His sermons, and seen His miracles, but not repented.

There is something very solemn in this saying. Let us look at it well. Let us think for a moment what dark, idolatrous, immoral, profligate places Tyre and Sidon must have been. Let us call to mind the unspeakable wickedness of Sodom. Let us remember that the cities named by our Lord, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, were probably no worse than other Jewish towns, and at all events, were far better than Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. And then let us observe, that the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, are to be in the

lowest hell, because they heard the Gospel, and yet did not repent--because they had great religious advantages, and did not use them. How dreadful this sounds!

Surely these words ought to make the ears of every one tingle, who hears the Gospel regularly, and yet remains unconverted. How great is the guilt of such a man before God! How great the danger in which he daily stands? Moral, and decent, and respectable as his life may be, he is actually more guilty than an idolatrous Tyrian or Sidonian, or a miserable inhabitant of Sodom. They had no spiritual light: he has, and neglects it. They heard no Gospel; he hears, but does not obey it. Their hearts might have been softened, if they had enjoyed his privileges. Tyre and Sidon "would have repented." Sodom "would have remained until this day." His heart under the full blaze of the Gospel remains hard and unmoved. There is but one painful conclusion to be drawn. His guilt will be found greater than theirs at the last day. Most true is the remark of an English bishop, "Among all the aggravations of our sins, there is none more heinous than the frequent hearing of our duty."

May we all think often about Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum! Let us settle it in our minds that it will never do to be content with merely hearing and liking the Gospel. We must go further than this. We must actually "repent and be converted." We must actually lay hold on Christ, and become one with Him. Until then we are in dreadful danger. It will prove more tolerable to have lived in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, than to have heard the Gospel in England, and at last died unconverted.

MATTHEW 11:25-30. The new message of the King

At that time, Jesus answered, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in your sight. All things have been delivered to me by my Father. No one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him.

"Come to me, all you who labour and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

There are few passages in the four Gospels more important than this. There are few which contain, in so short a compass, so many precious truths. May God give us an eye to see, and a heart to feel their value!

Let us learn, in the first place, the excellence of a childlike and teachable frame of mind. Our Lord says to His Father, "You hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to infants."

It is not for us to attempt to explain why some receive and believe the Gospel, while others do not. The sovereignty of God in this matter is a deep mystery--we cannot fathom it. But one thing, at all events, stands out in Scripture, as a great practical truth to be had in everlasting remembrance. Those from whom the Gospel is hidden are generally "the wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight." Those to whom the Gospel is revealed are generally humble, simpleminded, and willing to learn. The words of the Virgin Mary are continually being fulfilled, "He has filled the hungry with good things. He has sent the rich away empty." (Luke 1:53.)

Let us watch against PRIDE in every shape--pride of intellect, pride of wealth, pride in our own goodness, pride in our own deserts. Nothing is so likely to keep a man out of heaven, and prevent him seeing Christ, as pride. So long as we think we are something, we shall never be saved. Let us pray for and cultivate humility. Let us seek to know ourselves aright, and to find out our place in the sight of a holy God. The beginning of the way to heaven, is to feel that we are in the way to hell, and to be willing to be taught of the Spirit. One of the first steps in saving Christianity is to be able to say with Saul, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6.) There is hardly a sentence of our Lord's so frequently repeated as this, "He who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:14.)

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, the greatness and majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ. The language of our Lord on this subject is deep and wonderful. He says, "All things have been delivered to me by my Father. No one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him." We may truly say, as we read these words, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it." We see something of the perfect union which exists between the first and second Persons of the Trinity. We see something of the immeasurable superiority of the Lord Jesus to all who are nothing more than men. But still, when we have said all this, we must confess that there are heights and depths in this verse, which are beyond our feeble comprehension. We can only admire them in the spirit of little children. But the half of them, we must feel, remains untold.

Let us, however, draw from these words the great practical truth, that all power and authority, in everything that concerns our soul's interests, is placed in

our Lord Jesus Christ's hands. "All things are delivered unto him." He bears the keys--to Him we must go for admission into heaven. He is the door--through Him we must enter. He is the Shepherd--we must hear His voice, and follow Him, if we would not perish in the wilderness. He is the Physician--we must apply to Him, if we would be healed of the plague of sin. He is the bread of life--we must feed on Him, if we would have our souls satisfied. He is the light--we must walk after Him, if we would not wander in darkness. He is the fountain--we must wash in His blood, if we would be cleansed, and made ready for the great day of account. Blessed and glorious are these truths! If we have Christ, we have all things. (1 Cor. 3:22.)

Let us learn, in the last place, from this passage, the breadth and fullness of the invitations of Christ's Gospel. The last three verses of the chapter, which contain this lesson, are indeed precious. They meet the trembling sinner who asks, "Will Christ reveal His Father's love to such an one as me?" with the most gracious encouragement. They are verses which deserve to be read with special attention. For eighteen hundred years they have been a blessing to the world, and have done good to myriads of souls. There is not a sentence in those who does not contain a mine of thought.

Mark who they are that Jesus invites. He does not address those who feel themselves righteous and worthy. He addresses "all you who labor and are heavily burdened." It is a wide description. It comprises multitudes in this weary world. All who feel a load on their heart, of which they would sincerely get free, a load of sin or a load of sorrow, a load of anxiety or a load of remorse--all, whoever they may be, and whatever their past lives--all such are invited to come to Christ.

Mark what a gracious offer Jesus makes. "I will give you rest. You will find rest for your souls." How cheering and comfortable are these words! Unrest is one great characteristic of the world. Hurry, vexation, failure, disappointment, stare us in the face on every side. But here is hope. There is an ark of refuge for the weary, as truly as there was for Noah's dove. There is rest in Christ, rest of conscience, and rest of heart, rest built on pardon of all sin, rest flowing from peace with God.

Mark what a simple request Jesus makes to the labouring and heavy-laden ones. "Come to me--Take my yoke upon you, learn from me." He interposes no hard conditions. He speaks nothing of works to be done first, and deservingness of His gifts to be established. He only asks us to come to Him just as we are, with all our sins, and to submit ourselves like little children to His teaching. "Go

not," He seems to say, "to man for relief. Wait not for help to arise from any other quarter. Just as you are, this very day, come to me."

Mark what an encouraging account Jesus gives of Himself. He says, "I am gentle and lowly of heart." How true that is, the experience of all the saints of God has often proved. Mary and Martha at Bethany, Peter after his fall, the disciples after the resurrection, Thomas after his cold unbelief, all tasted the "meekness and gentleness of Christ." It is the only place in Scripture where the "heart" of Christ is actually named. It is a saying never to be forgotten.

Mark, lastly, the encouraging account that Jesus gives of His service. He says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." No doubt there is a cross to be carried, if we follow Christ. No doubt there are trials to be endured, and battles to be fought. But the comforts of the Gospel far outweigh the cross. Compared to the service of the world and sin, compared to the yoke of Jewish ceremonies, and the bondage of human superstition, Christ's service is in the highest sense easy and light. His yoke is no more a burden than the feathers are to a bird. His commandments are not grievous. His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace. (1 John 5:3. Prov. 3:17.)

And now comes the solemn inquiry--Have we accepted this invitation for ourselves? Have we no sins to be forgiven, no griefs to be removed, no wounds of conscience to be healed? If we have, let us hear Christ's voice. He speaks to us as well as to the Jews. He says, "Come to me." Here is the key to true happiness. Here is the secret of having a happy heart. All turns and hinges on an acceptance of this offer of Christ.

May we never be satisfied until we know and feel that we have come to Christ by faith for rest, and do still come to Him for fresh supplies of grace every day! If we have come to Him already, let us learn to cleave to Him more closely. If we have never come to Him yet, let us begin to come today. His word shall never be broken--"Him that comes unto me, I will in nowise cast out." (John 6:37.)

Chapter 12

12.Rejection of the King consummated

Verses 1-21. The King in rejection

MATTHEW 12:1-13

At that time, Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the grain fields. His disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him, "Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

But he said to them, "Haven't you read what David did, when he was hungry, and those who were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and ate the show bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law, that on the Sabbath day, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? But I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

He departed there, and went into their synagogue. And behold there was a man with a withered hand. They asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" that they might accuse him.

He said to them, "What man is there among you, who has one sheep, and if this one falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, won't he grab on to it, and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day." Then he told the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out; and it was restored whole, just like the other.

The one great subject which stands out prominently in this passage of Scripture, is the SABBATH DAY. It is a subject on which strange opinions prevailed among the Jews in our Lord's time. The Pharisees had added to the teaching of Scripture about it, and overlaid the true character of the day with the traditions of men. It is a subject on which diverse opinions have often been held in the Churches of Christ, and wide differences exist among men at the present time. Let us see what we may learn about it from our Lord's teaching in these verses.

Let us, in the first place, settle it in our minds as an established principle, that our Lord Jesus Christ does not do away with the observance of a weekly

Sabbath day. He neither does so here, nor elsewhere in the four Gospels. We often find His opinion expressed about the Jewish errors on the subject of the Sabbath. But we do not find a word to teach us that His disciples were not to keep a Sabbath at all.

It is of much importance to observe this. The mistakes that have arisen from a superficial consideration of our Lord's sayings on the Sabbath question, are neither few nor small. Thousands have rushed to the hasty conclusion, that Christians have nothing to do with the fourth commandment, and that it is no more binding on us than the Mosaic law about sacrifices. There is nothing in the New Testament to justify any such conclusion.

The plain truth is, that our Lord did not abolish the law of the weekly Sabbath. He only freed it from incorrect interpretations, and purified it from man-made additions. He did not tear out of the decalogue the fourth commandment. He only stripped off the miserable traditions with which the Pharisees had incrusted the day, and by which they had made it, not a blessing, but a burden. He left the fourth commandment where he found it, a part of the eternal law of God, of which no jot or title was ever to pass away. May we never forget this!

Let us, in the second place, settle it in our minds, that our Lord Jesus Christ allows all works of real necessity and mercy to be done on the Sabbath day.

This is a principle which is abundantly established in the passage of Scripture we are now considering. We find our Lord justifying His disciples for plucking the ears of corn on a Sabbath. It was an act permitted in Scripture. (Deut. 23:25.) They "were hungry," and in need of food. Therefore they were not to blame. We find Him maintaining the lawfulness of healing a sick man on the Sabbath day. The man was suffering from disease and pain. In such a case it was no breach of God's commandment to afford relief. We ought never to rest from doing good.

The arguments by which our Lord supports the lawfulness of any work of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath, are striking and unanswerable. He reminds the Pharisees, who charged Him and His disciples with breaking the law, how David and his men, for lack of other food, had eaten the holy show-bread out of the tabernacle. He reminds them how the priests in the temple are obliged to do work on the Sabbath, by slaying animals and offering sacrifices. He reminds them how even a sheep would be helped out of a pit on the Sabbath, rather than allowed to suffer and die, by any one of themselves. Above all, He lays down the great principle, that no ordinance of God is to be pressed so far as to make us

neglect the plain duties of charity. "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." The first table of the law is not to be so interpreted as to make us break the second. The fourth commandment is not to be so explained, as to make us unkind and unmerciful to our neighbour. There is deep wisdom in all this. We are reminded of the saying, "Never a man spoke like this man."

In leaving the subject, let us beware that we are never tempted to take low views of the sanctity of the Christian Sabbath. Let us take care that we do not make our gracious Lord's teaching an excuse for Sabbath profanation. Let us not abuse the liberty which He has so clearly marked out for us, and pretend that we do things on the Sabbath from "necessity and mercy," which in reality we do for our own selfish gratification.

There is great reason for warning people on this point. The mistakes of the Pharisee about the Sabbath were in one direction. The mistakes of the Christian are in another. The Pharisee pretended to add to the holiness of the day. The Christian is too often disposed to take away from that holiness, and to keep the day in an idle, profane, irreverent manner. May we all watch our own conduct on this subject. Saving Christianity is closely bound up with Sabbath observance. May we never forget that our great aim should be to "keep the Sabbath holy." Works of necessity may be done. "It is lawful to do well," and show mercy. But to give the Sabbath to idleness, pleasure-seeking, or the world, is utterly unlawful. It is contrary to the example of Christ, and a sin against a plain commandment of God.

MATTHEW 12:14-21

But the Pharisees went out, and conspired against him, how they might destroy him. Jesus, perceiving that, withdrew from there. Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them all, and charged those who they should not make him known: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit on him. He will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not strive, nor shout; neither will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He won't break a bruised reed. He won't quench a smoking flax, until he leads justice to victory. In his name, the nations will hope."

The first thing which demands our notice in this passage, is the desperate wickedness of the human heart, which it exemplifies. Silenced and defeated by our Lord's arguments, the Pharisees plunged deeper and deeper into sin. They "went out, and conspired against him, how they might destroy him."

What evil had our Lord done, that He should be so treated? None, none at all. No charge could be brought against His life--He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners--His days were spent in doing good. No charge could be brought against His teaching--He had proved it to be agreeable to Scripture and reason, and no reply had been made to His proofs. But it mattered little how perfectly He lived or taught. He was hated.

This is human nature appearing in its true colours. The unconverted heart hates God, and will show its hatred whenever it dares, and has a favourable opportunity. It will persecute God's witnesses. It will dislike all who have anything of God's mind, and are renewed after His image. Why were so many of the prophets killed? Why were the names of the apostles cast out as evil by the Jews? Why were the early martyrs slain? Why were John Huss, and Jerome of Prague, and Ridley, and Latimer burned at the stake? Not for any sins that they had sinned--not for any wickedness they had committed. They all suffered because they were godly men. And human nature, unconverted, hates godly men, because it hates God.

It must never surprise true Christians if they meet with the same treatment that the Lord Jesus met with. "Don't be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you." (1 John 3:13.) It is not the utmost consistency, or the closest walk with God, that will exempt them from the enmity of the natural man. They need not torture their consciences by fancying that if they were only more faultless and consistent, everybody would surely love them. It is all a mistake. They should remember, that there was never but one perfect man on earth, and that He was not loved, but hated. It is not the infirmities of a believer that the world dislikes, but his goodness. It is not the remains of the old nature that call forth the world's enmity, but the exhibition of the new. Let us remember these things, and be patient. The world hated Christ, and the world will hate Christians.

The second thing which demands our notice in this passage, is the encouraging description of our Lord Jesus Christ's character, which Matthew draws from the prophet Isaiah. "He won't break a bruised reed, he won't quench a smoking flax."

What are we to understand by the bruised reed, and smoking flax? The language of the prophet no doubt is figurative. What is it that these two expressions mean? The simplest explanation seems to be, that the Holy Spirit is here describing believers whose grace is at present weak, whose repentance is feeble, and whose faith is small. Towards such people the Lord Jesus Christ will be very tender and compassionate. Weak as the broken reed is, it shall not be broken. Small as the spark of fire may be within the smoking flax, it shall not be

quenched. It is a standing truth in the kingdom of grace, that weak grace, weak faith, and weak repentance, are all precious in our Lord's sight. Mighty as He is, "He doesn't despise anyone." (Job 36:5.)

The doctrine here laid down is full of comfort and consolation. There are thousands in every church of Christ to whom it ought to speak peace and hope. There are some in every congregation, that hear the Gospel, who are ready to despair of their own salvation, because their strength seems so small. They are full of fears and despondency, because their knowledge, and faith, and hope, and love, appear so dwarfish and diminutive. Let them drink comfort out of this text. Let them know that weak faith gives a man as real and true a saving interest in Christ as strong faith, though it may not give him the same joy. There is life in an infant as truly as in a grown up man. There is fire in a spark as truly as in a burning flame. The least degree of grace is an everlasting possession. It comes down from heaven. It is precious in our Lord's eyes. It shall never be overthrown.

Does Satan make light of the beginnings of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ? No! indeed! he does not. He has great wrath, because he sees his time is short. Do the angels of God think lightly of the first signs of penitence and feeling after God in Christ? No indeed! "there is joy" among them, when they behold the sight. Does the Lord Jesus regard no faith and repentance with interest, unless they are strong and mighty? No! indeed! As soon as that bruised reed, Saul of Tarsus, begins to cry to Him, He sends Ananias to him, saying, "Behold, he is praying." (Acts 9:11.) We err greatly if we do not encourage the very first movements of a soul towards Christ. Let the ignorant world scoff and mock, if it will. We may be sure that "bruised reeds" and "smoking flax" are very precious in our Lord's eyes.

May we all lay these things to heart, and use them in time of needs both for ourselves and others. It should be a standing maxim in our religion, that a spark is better than utter darkness, and little faith better than no faith at all. "Who despises the day of small things?" (Zechar. 4:10.) It is not despised by Christ. It ought not to be despised by Christians.

Verses 22-45. The King and the unpardonable sin

MATTHEW 12:22-37

Then one possessed by a demon, blind and mute, was brought to him and he healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. All the multitudes were amazed, and said, "Can this be the son of David?" But when the

Pharisees heard it, they said, "This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons."

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter into the house of the strong man, and plunder his goods, unless he first bind the strong man? Then he will plunder his house.

"He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters. Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come.

"Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit. You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings out good things, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings out evil things. I tell you that every idle word that men speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

This passage of Scripture contains "things hard to be understood." The sin against the Holy Spirit in particular has never been fully explained by the most learned divines. It is not difficult to show from Scripture what the sin is not. It is difficult to show clearly what it is. We must not be surprised. The Bible would not be the book of God, if it had not deep places here and there, which man has no line to fathom. Let us rather thank God that there are lessons of wisdom to be gathered, even out of these verses, which the unlearned may easily understand.

Let us gather from them, in the first place, that there is nothing too blasphemous for hardened and prejudiced men to say against Christ. Our Lord casts out a devil; and at once the Pharisees declare that He does it "by the prince of the devils."

This was an absurd charge. Our Lord shows that it was unreasonable to suppose that the devil would help to pull down his own kingdom, and "Satan cast out Satan." But there is nothing too absurd and unreasonable for men to say, when they are thoroughly set against Christ. The Pharisees are not the only people who have lost sight of logic, good sense, and temper, when they have attacked the Gospel of Christ.

Strange as this charge may sound, it is one that has often been made against the servants of God. Their enemies have been obliged to confess that they are doing a work, and producing a good effect on the world. The results of Christian labor stare them in the face. They cannot deny them. What then shall they say? They say the very thing that the Pharisees said of our Lord, "It is the devil." The early heretics used language of this kind about Athanasius. The Roman Catholics spread reports of this sort about Martin Luther. Such things will be said as long as the world stands.

We must never be surprised to hear of dreadful charges being made against the best of men, without cause. "If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" It is an old device. When the Christian's arguments cannot be answered, and the Christian's works cannot be denied, the last resource of the wicked is to try to blacken the Christian's character. If this be our lot, let us bear it patiently. Having Christ and a good conscience, we may be content. False charges will not keep us out of heaven. Our character will be cleared at the last day.

In the second place, let us gather out of these verses the impossibility of neutrality in religion. "He who is not with Christ is against him, and he who doesn't gather with him, scatters."

There are many people in every age of the Church, who need to have this lesson pressed upon them. They endeavour to steer a middle course in religion. They are not so bad as many sinners, but still they are not saints. They feel the truth of Christ's Gospel, when it is brought before them, but are afraid to confess what they feel. Because they have these feelings, they flatter themselves they are not so bad as others. And yet they shrink from the standard of faith and practice which the Lord Jesus sets up. They are not boldly on Christ's side, and yet they are not openly against Him. Our Lord warns all such that they are in a dangerous position. There are only two parties in religious matters. There are only two camps. There are only two sides. Are we with Christ, and working in His cause? If not, we are against Him. Are we doing good in the world? If not, we are doing harm.

The principle here laid down is one which it concerns us all to remember. Let us settle it in our minds, that we shall never have peace, and do good to others, unless we are thorough-going and decided in our Christianity. The way of Gamaliel and Erasmus never yet brought happiness and usefulness to any one, and never will.

In the third place, let us gather from these verses the exceeding sinfulness of sins against knowledge. This is a practical conclusion which appears to flow naturally from our Lord's words about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Difficult as these words undoubtedly are, they seem fairly to prove that there are degrees in sin. Offences arising from ignorance of the true mission of the Son of Man, will not be punished so heavily as offences committed against the noontide light of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. The brighter the light, the greater the guilt of him who rejects it. The clearer a man's knowledge of the nature of the Gospel, the greater his sin, if he wilfully refuses to repent and believe.

The doctrine here taught is one that does not stand alone in Scripture. Paul says to the Hebrews, "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened--if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." "If we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment." (Heb. 6:4-7, and 10:26, 27.) It is a doctrine of which we find mournful proofs in every quarter. The unconverted children of godly parents, the unconverted servants of godly families, and the unconverted members of evangelical congregations are the hardest people on earth to impress. They seem past feeling. The same fire which melts the wax, hardens the clay.

It is a doctrine, moreover, which receives dreadful confirmation from the histories of some of those whose last ends were eminently hopeless. Pharaoh, and Saul, and Ahab, and Judas Iscariot, and Julian, and Francis Spira, are fearful illustrations of our Lord's meaning. In each of these cases there was a combination of clear knowledge and deliberate rejection of Christ. In each there was light in the head, but hatred of truth in the heart. And the end of each seems to have been blackness of darkness forever.

May God give us a will to use our knowledge, whether it be little or great! May we beware of neglecting our opportunities, and leaving our privileges unimproved! Have we light? Then let us live fully up to our light. Do we know the truth? Then let us walk in the truth. This is the best safeguard against the unpardonable sin.

In the last place, let us gather from these verses the immense importance of carefulness about our daily words. Our Lord tells us, that "every idle word that men speak, they will give account of in the day of judgment." And He adds, "By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

There are few of our Lord's sayings which are so heart-searching as this. There is nothing, perhaps, to which most men pay less attention than their words. They go through their daily work, speaking and talking without thought or reflection, and seem to imagine that if they do what is right, it matters but little what they say.

But is it so? Are our words so utterly trifling and unimportant? We dare not say so, with such a passage of Scripture as this before our eyes. Our words are the evidence of the state of our hearts, as surely as the taste of the water is an evidence of the state of the spring. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." The lips only utter what the mind conceives. Our words will form one subject of inquiry at the day of judgment. We shall have to give account of our sayings, as well as our doings. Truly these are very solemn considerations. If there were no other text in the Bible, this passage ought to convince us, that we are all "guilty before God," and need a righteousness better than our own, even the righteousness of Christ. (Phil. 3:9.)

Let us be humble as we read this passage, in the recollection of time past. How many idle, foolish, vain, light, frivolous, sinful, and unprofitable things we have all said! How many words we have used, which, like thistle-down, have flown far and wide, and sown mischief in the hearts of others that will never die! How often when we have met our friends, "our conversation," to use an old saint's expression, "has only made work for repentance." There is deep truth in the remark of Burkitt, "A profane scoff or atheistical jest may stick in the minds of those that hear it, after the tongue that spoke it is dead. A word spoken is physically transient, but morally permanent." "Death and life," says Solomon, "are in the power of the tongue." (Prov. 18:21.)

Let us be watchful as we read this passage about words, when we look forward to our days yet to come. Let us resolve, by God's grace, to be more careful over our tongues, and more particular about our use of them. Let us pray daily that our "speech may be always with grace." (Coloss. 4:6.) Let us say every morning with holy David, "I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not in my tongue." Let us cry with him to the Strong for strength, and say, "Set a watch over my mouth, and keep the door of my lips." Well indeed might James say, "If any man offends not in word, the same is a perfect man." (Psalm. 39:1, 141:3; James 3:2.)

Verses 46-50. The King's new relationship

MATTHEW 12:38-50

Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, someone greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone greater than Solomon is here. But the unclean spirit, when he is gone out of the man, passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and doesn't find it. Then he says, 'I will return into my house from which I came out,' and when he has come back, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes, and takes with himself seven other spirits more evil than he is, and they enter in and dwell there. The last state of that man becomes worse than the first. Even so will it be also to this evil generation."

While he was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, seeking to speak to him. One said to him, "Behold, your mother and your brothers stand outside, seeking to speak to you."

But he answered him who spoke to him, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" He stretched out his hand towards his disciples, and said, "Behold, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother."

The beginning of this passage is one of those places which strikingly illustrate the truth of Old Testament History. Our Lord speaks of the queen of the South, as a real, true person, who had lived and died. He refers to the story of Jonah, and his miraculous preservation in the whale's belly, as undeniable matters of fact. Let us remember this, if we hear men professing to believe the writers of the New Testament, and yet sneering at the things recorded in the Old Testament, as if they were fables. Such men forget, that in so doing they pour contempt upon Christ Himself. The authority of the Old and New Testament stands or falls together. The same Spirit inspired men to write of Solomon and

Jonah, who inspired the Evangelists to write of Christ. These are not unimportant points in this day. Let them be well fixed in our minds.

The first practical lesson which demands our attention in these verses, is the amazing power of unbelief. Mark how the Scribes and Pharisees call upon our Lord to show them more miracles. "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." They pretended that they only needed more evidence, in order to be convinced, and become disciples. They shut their eyes to the many wonderful works which Jesus had already done. It was not enough for those who He had healed the sick, and cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, and cast out devils. They were not yet persuaded. They yet demanded more proof. They would not see what our Lord plainly pointed at in His reply, that they had no real will to believe. There was evidence enough to convince them, but they had no wish to be convinced.

There are many in the Church of Christ, who are exactly in the state of these Scribes and Pharisees. They flatter themselves that they only require a little more proof to become decided Christians. They fancy that if their reason and intellect could only be met with some additional arguments, they would at once give up all for Christ's sake, take up the cross, and follow Him. But in the mean time, they wait. Alas! For their blindness. They will not see that there is abundance of evidence on every side of them. The truth is, that they do not want to be convinced.

May we all be on our guard against the spirit of unbelief! It is a growing evil in these latter days. Lack of simple, childlike faith is an increasing feature of the times, in every rank of society. The true explanation of a hundred strange things that startle us in the conduct of leading men in churches and states, is downright lack of faith. Men who do not believe all that God says in the Bible, must necessarily take a vacillating and undecided line on moral and religious questions. "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established." (Isaiah 7:9.)

The second practical lesson which meets us in these verses is the immense danger of a partial and imperfect religious reformation. Mark what a dreadful picture our Lord draws of the man to whom the unclean spirit returns, after having once left him. How fearful are those words, "I will return into my house from which I came out!" How vivid that description, "he finds it empty, swept, and put in order!" How tremendous the conclusion, "Then he goes, and takes with himself seven other spirits more evil than he is, and they enter in and dwell there. The last state of that man becomes worse than the first!" It is a picture most painfully full of meaning. Let us scan it closely, and learn wisdom.

It is certain that we have in this picture the history of the Jewish church and nation, at the time of our Lord's coming. Called as they were at first out of Egypt to be God's peculiar people, they never seem to have wholly lost the tendency to worship idols. Redeemed as they afterwards were from the captivity of Babylon, they never seem to have rendered to God a due return for His goodness. Aroused as they had been by John the Baptist's preaching, their repentance appears to have been only skin-deep. At the time when our Lord spoke, they had become, as a nation, harder and more perverse than ever. The grossness of idol-worship had given place to the deadness of mere formality. Seven other spirits worse than the first, had taken possession of them. Their last state was rapidly becoming worse than the first. Yet forty years, and their iniquity came to the full. They madly plunged into a war with Rome. Judea became a very Babel of confusion. Jerusalem was taken. The temple was destroyed. The Jews were scattered over the face of the earth.

Again, it is highly probable that we have in this picture the history of the whole body of Christian churches. Delivered as they were from heathen darkness by the preaching of the Gospel, they have never really lived up to their light. Revived as many of them were at the time of the Protestant Reformation, they have none of them made a right use of their privileges, or "gone on to perfection." They have all more or less stopped short and settled on their lees. They have all been too ready to be satisfied with mere external amendments. And now there are painful symptoms in many quarters that the evil spirit has returned to his house, and is preparing an outbreak of infidelity, and false doctrine, such as the churches have never yet seen. Between unbelief in some quarters, and formal superstition in others, everything seems ripe for some fearful manifestation of Antichrist. It may well be feared that the last state of the professing Christian churches will prove worse than the first.

Saddest and worst of all, we have in this picture the history of many an individual's soul. There are men who seemed at one time of their lives to be under the influence of strong religious feelings. They reformed their ways. They laid aside many things that are bad. They took up many things that are good. But they stopped there, and went no further, and by and bye gave up religion altogether. The evil spirit returned to their hearts, and found them empty, swept, and garnished. They are now worse than they ever were before. Their consciences seem seared. Their sense of religious things appears entirely destroyed. They are like men given over to a reprobate mind. One would say it was "impossible to renew them to repentance." None prove so hopelessly wicked as those who, after experiencing strong religious convictions, have gone back again to sin and the world.

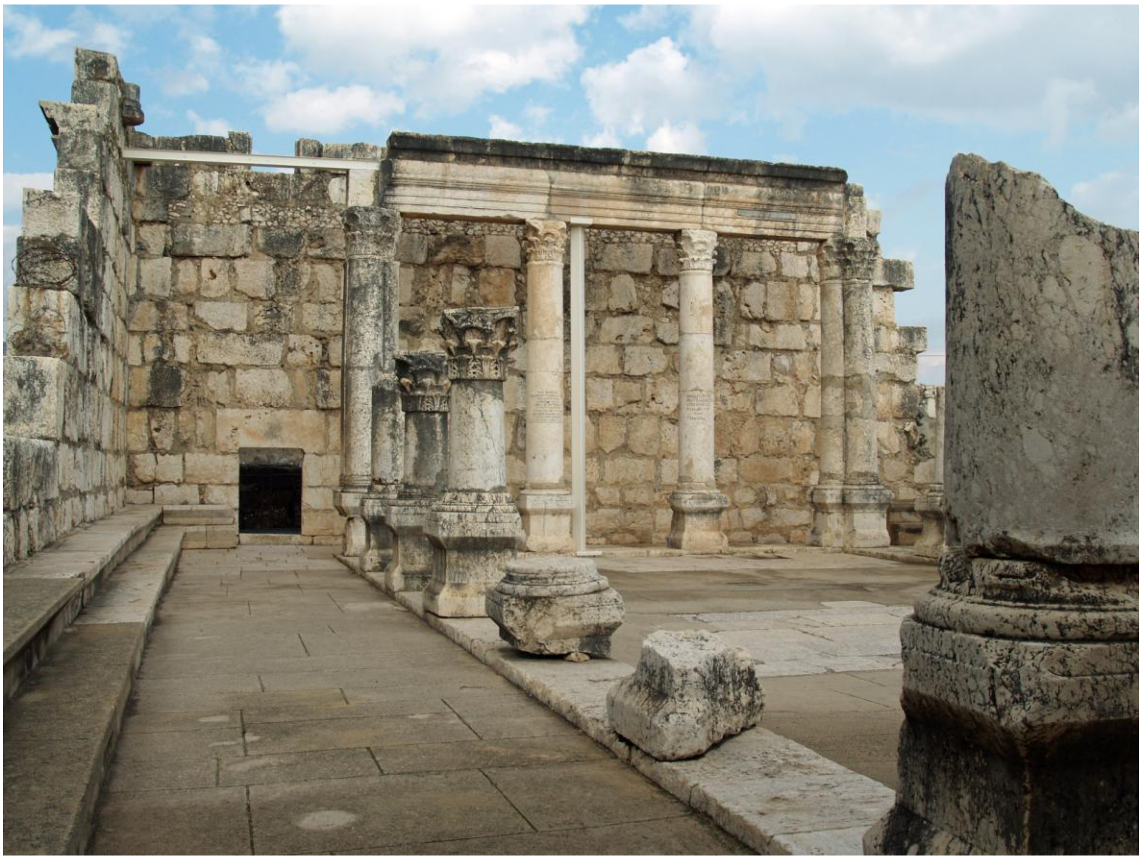
If we love life, let us pray that these lessons may be deeply impressed on our minds. Let us never be content with a partial reformation of life, without thorough conversion to God, and mortification of the whole body of sin. It is a good thing to strive to cast sin out of our hearts. But let us take care that we also receive the grace of God in its place. Let us make sure that we not only get rid of the old tenant, the devil, but have also got dwelling in us the Holy Spirit.

The last practical lesson which meets us in these verses is the tender affection with which the Lord Jesus regards His true disciples.

Mark how He speaks of every one who does the will of His Father in heaven. He says, "he is my brother, and sister, and mother." What gracious words these are! Who can conceive the depth of our dear Lord's love towards His relations according to the flesh? It was a pure, unselfish love. It must have been a mighty love, a love that passes man's understanding. Yet here we see that all His believing people are counted as His family. He loves them, feels for them, cares for them, as members of His family, bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh.

There is a solemn warning here to all who mock and persecute true Christians on account of their religion. They consider not what they are doing. They are persecuting the near relations of the King of kings. They will find at the last day that they have mocked those whom the Judge of all regards as "His brother, and sister, and mother."

There is rich encouragement here for all believers. They are far more precious in their Lord's eyes than they are in their own. Their faith may be feeble, their repentance weak, their strength small. They may be poor and needy in this world. But there is a glorious "whoever" in the last verse of this chapter which ought to cheer them. "Whoever" believes is a near relation of Christ. The elder Brother will provide for him in time and eternity, and never let him be cast away. There is not one "little sister" in the family of the redeemed, whom Jesus does not remember. (Cant. 8:8.) Joseph provided richly for all his relations, and Jesus will provide for His.



Remains of the third century synagogue at Capernaum

Chapter 13

13. The rejected King tells of the interim kingdom

Verses 1-2. The King at the seaside

Verses 3-52. The seven parables (mysteries) of the kingdom

Verses 53-58. Further evidences of the King's rejection

MATTHEW 13:1-23

On that day Jesus went out of the house, and sat by the seaside. Great multitudes gathered to him, so that he entered into a boat, and sat, and all the multitude stood on the beach. He spoke to them many things in parables, saying, "Behold, a farmer went out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell by the roadside, and the birds came and devoured them. Others fell on rocky ground, where they didn't have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of earth. When the sun had risen, they were scorched. Because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and

choked them: and others fell on good soil, and yielded fruit: some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The disciples came, and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

He answered them, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to them. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever doesn't have, from him will be taken away even that which he has. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they don't see, and hearing, they don't hear, neither do they understand. In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says,

'By hearing you will hear, and will in no way understand; Seeing you will see, and will in no way perceive: this people's heart has grown callous, their ears are dull of hearing, they have closed their eyes; or else perhaps they might perceive with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and should turn again; and I would heal them.'

"But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For most certainly I tell you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which you see, and didn't see them; and to hear the things which you hear, and didn't hear them.

"Hear, then, the parable of the farmer. When anyone hears the word of the Kingdom, and doesn't understand it, the evil one comes, and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown by the roadside. What was sown on the rocky places, this is he who hears the word, and immediately with joy receives it; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while. When oppression or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. What was sown among the thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. What was sown on the good ground, this is he who hears the word, and understands it, who most certainly bears fruit, and brings forth, some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty."

The chapter which these verses begin is remarkable for the number of parables which it contains. Seven striking illustrations of spiritual truth are here drawn by the great Head of the Church from the book of nature. By so doing He shows us that religious teaching may draw helps from everything in creation.

Those that would "find out acceptable words," should not forget this. (Eccles. 12:10.)



The parable of the sower, which begins this chapter, is one of those parables which admit of a very wide application. It is being continually verified under our own eyes. Wherever the word of God is preached or expounded, and people are assembled to hear it, the sayings of our Lord in this parable are found to be true. It describes what goes on, as a general rule, in all congregations.

Let us learn, in the first place, from this parable, that the work of the preacher resembles that of the sower. Like the sower, the preacher must SOW GOOD SEED, if he wants to see fruit. He must sow the pure word of God, and not the traditions of the church, or the doctrines of men. Without this his labour will be in vain. He may go to and fro, and seem to say much, and to work much in his weekly round of ministerial duty. But there will be no harvest of souls for heaven, no living results, and no conversions.

Like the sower, the preacher must be DILIGENT. He must spare no pains. He must use every possible means to make his work prosper. He must patiently "sow beside all waters," and "sow in hope." He must be "instant in season and out of season." He must not be deterred by difficulties and discouragements. "He that observes the wind shall not sow ." No doubt his success does not entirely depend upon his labour and diligence. But without labor and diligence success will seldom be obtained. (Isaiah. 32:20. 2 Tim. 4:2. Eccles. 11:4.)

Like the sower, the preacher CANNOT GIVE LIFE. He can scatter the seed committed to his charge, but cannot command it to grow. He may offer the word of truth to a people, but he cannot make them receive it and bear fruit. To give life is God's sovereign prerogative. "It is the Spirit who gives life." God alone can "give the increase." (John 6:63. 1 Cor. 3:7.)

Let these things sink down into our hearts. It is no light thing to be a real minister of God's Word. To be an idle, formal workman in the Church is an easy business. To be a faithful sower is very hard. Preachers ought to be specially remembered in our prayers.

In the next place, let us learn from this passage, that there are various ways of hearing the word of God without benefit. We may listen to a sermon with a heart like the hard "wayside,"--careless, thoughtless, and unconcerned. Christ crucified may be affectionately set before us, and we may hear of His sufferings with utter indifference, as a subject in which we have no interest. Fast as the words fall on our ears, the devil may pluck them away, and we may go home as if we had not heard a sermon at all. Alas! there are many such hearers! It is as true of them as of the idols of old, "eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not." (Psalm. 135:16,17.) Truth seems to have no more effect on their hearts than water on a stone.

We may listen to a sermon with pleasure, while the impression produced on us is only temporary and short-lived. Our hearts, like the "stony ground," may yield a plentiful crop of warm feelings and good resolutions. But all this time there may be no deeply-rooted work in our souls, and the first cold blast of opposition or temptation may cause our seeming religion to wither away. Alas! there are many such hearers! The mere love of sermons is no sign of grace. Thousands of baptized people are like the Jews of Ezekiel's day, "You are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear your words, but they don't do them." (Ezek. 33:32.)

We may listen to a sermon, and approve of every word it contains, and yet get no good from it, in consequence of the absorbing influence of this world. Our hearts, like the "thorny ground," may be choked with a noxious crop of cares, pleasures, and worldly plans. We may really like the Gospel, and wish to obey it, and yet insensibly give it no chance of bearing fruit, by allowing other things to fill a place in our affections, and insensibly to fill our whole hearts. Alas! there are many such hearers! They know the truth well. They hope one day to be decided Christians. But they never come to the point of giving up all for Christ's sake. They never make up their minds to "seek first the kingdom of God,"--and so die in their sins.

These are points that we ought to weigh well. We should never forget that there are more ways than one of hearing the word without profit. It is not enough that we come to hear. We may come, and be careless. It is not enough that we are not careless hearers. Our impressions may be only temporary, and ready to

perish. It is not enough that our impressions are not merely temporary. But they may be continually yielding no result, in consequence of our obstinate cleaving to the world. Truly "the heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt--who can know it?" (Jerem. 17:9.)

In the last place, let us learn from this parable, that there is only one evidence of hearing the word rightly. That evidence is to BEAR FRUIT. The fruit here spoken of is the fruit of the Spirit. Repentance towards God, faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, holiness of life and character, prayerfulness, humility, charity, spiritual-mindedness--these are the only satisfactory proofs that the seed of God's word is doing its proper work in our souls. Without such proofs, our religion is vain, however high our profession. It is no better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Christ has said, "I have chosen you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit." (John 15:16.)

There is no part of the whole parable more important than this. We must never be content with a barren orthodoxy, and a cold maintenance of correct theological views. We must not be satisfied with clear knowledge, warm feelings, and a decent profession. We must see to it that the Gospel we profess to love, produces positive "fruit" in our hearts and lives. This is real Christianity. Those words of James should often ring in our ears, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves." (James 1:22.)

Let us not leave these verses without putting to ourselves the important question, "How do WE hear?" We live in a Christian country. We go to a place of worship Sunday after Sunday, and hear sermons. In what spirit do we hear them? What effect have they upon our characters? Can we point to anything that deserves the name of "fruit?"

We may rest assured that to reach heaven at last, it needs something more than to go to Church regularly on Sundays, and listen to preachers. The word of God must be received into our hearts, and become the mainspring of our conduct. It must produce practical impressions on our inward man, that shall appear in our outward behaviour. If it does not do this, it will only add to our condemnation in the day of judgment.

MATTHEW 13:24-43

He set another parable before them, saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while people slept, his enemy came and sowed weeds also among the wheat, and went away. But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then the weeds appeared also. The servants of

the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where did this come from?'

"He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.'

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and gather them up?'

"But he said, 'No, lest perhaps while you gather up the weeds, you root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the harvest time I will tell the reapers, "First, gather up the weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn."'

He set another parable before them, saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; which indeed is smaller than all seeds. But when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches."

He spoke another parable to them. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, until it was all leavened."

Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the multitudes; and without a parable, he didn't speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying,

"I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world."

Then Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into the house. His disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field."

He answered them, "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the Kingdom; and the weeds are the children of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. As therefore the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire; so will it be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do iniquity, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

The parable of the wheat and weeds, which occupies the chief part of these verses, is one of peculiar importance in the present day. (The consideration of the parables of the mustard seed and the leaves is purposely deferred until a future part of the Exposition.) It is eminently calculated to correct the extravagant expectations in which many Christians indulge, as to the effect of missions abroad, and of preaching the Gospel at home. May we give it the attention which it deserves!

In the first place, this parable teaches us, that good and evil will always be found together in the professing Church, until the end of the world. The visible Church is set before us as a mixed body. It is a vast "field" in which "wheat and weeds" grow side by side. We must expect to find believers and unbelievers, converted and unconverted, "the children of the kingdom, and the children of the wicked one," all mingled together in every congregation of baptized people.

The purest preaching of the Gospel will not prevent this. In every age of the Church, the same state of things has existed. It was the experience of the early Fathers. It was the experience of the Reformers. It is the experience of the best ministers at the present hour. There has never been a visible Church or a religious assembly, of which the members have been all "wheat." The devil, that great enemy of souls, has always taken care to sow "weeds."

The most strict and prudent discipline will not prevent this. Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents, all alike find it to be so. Do what we will to purify a church, we shall never succeed in obtaining a perfectly pure communion. Weeds will be found among the wheat. Hypocrites and deceivers will creep in. And, worst of all, if we are extreme in our efforts to obtain purity, we do more harm than good. We run the risk of encouraging many a Judas Iscariot, and breaking many a bruised reed. In our zeal to "gather up the weeds," we are in danger of "rooting up the wheat with them." Such zeal is not according to knowledge, and has often done much harm. Those who care not what happens to the wheat, provided they can root up the tares, show little of the mind of Christ. And after all there is deep truth in the charitable saying of Augustine, "Those who are weeds today, may be wheat tomorrow."

Are we inclined to look for the conversion of the whole world by the labors of missionaries and ministers? Let us place this parable before us, and beware of such an idea. We shall never see all the inhabitants of earth the wheat of God, in the present order of things. The weeds and wheat will "grow together until the harvest." The kingdoms of this world will never become the kingdom of Christ, and the millennium begin, until the King Himself returns.

Are we ever tried by the scoffing argument of the infidel, that Christianity can not be a true religion, when there are so many false Christians? Let us call to mind this parable, and remain unmoved. Let us tell the infidel, that the state of things he scoffs at does not surprise us at all. Our Master prepared us for it 1800 years ago. He foresaw and foretold, that His Church would be a field, containing not only wheat, but tares.

Are we ever tempted to leave one Church for another, because we see many of its members unconverted? Let us remember this parable, and take heed what we do. We shall never find a perfect Church. We may spend our lives in migrating from communion to communion, and pass our days in perpetual disappointment. Go where we will, and worship where we may we shall always find weeds.

In the second place the parable teaches us, that there is to be a day of separation between the godly and ungodly members of the visible Church, at the end of the world.

The present mixed state of things is not to be forever. The wheat and the weeds are to be divided at last. The Lord Jesus shall "send forth his angels" in the day of His second advent, and gather all professing Christians into two great companies. Those mighty reapers shall make no mistake. They shall discern with unerring judgment between the righteous and the wicked, and place every one in his own lot. The saints and faithful servants of Christ shall receive glory, honor, and eternal life. The worldly, the ungodly, the careless, and the unconverted shall be "cast into a furnace of fire," and receive shame and everlasting contempt.

There is something peculiarly solemn in this part of the parable. The meaning of it admits of no mistake. Our Lord Himself explains it in words of singular clearness, as if He would impress it deeply on our minds. Well may He say at the conclusion, "Who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Let the ungodly man tremble when he reads this parable. Let him see in its fearful language his own certain doom, unless he repents and is converted. Let him know that he is sowing misery for himself, if he goes on still in his neglect of God. Let him reflect that his end will be to be gathered among the "bundles" of weeds, and be burned. Surely such a prospect ought to make a man think. As Baxter truly says, "We must not misinterpret God's patience with the ungodly."

Let the believer in Christ take comfort when he reads this parable. Let him see that there is happiness and safety prepared for him in the great and dreadful

day of the Lord. The voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God will proclaim no terror for him. They will summon him to join what he has long desired to see, a perfect Church and a perfect communion of saints. How beautiful will the whole body of believers appear, when finally separated from the wicked! How fine will the wheat look in the barn of God, when the weeds are at length taken away! How brightly will grace shine, when no longer dimmed by incessant contact with the worldly and unconverted!

The righteous are little known in the present day. The world sees no beauty in them, even as it saw none in their Master. "The world doesn't know us, because it didn't know him." (1 John 3:1.) But the righteous shall one day "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." To use the words of Matthew Henry, "their sanctification will be perfected, and their justification will be published." "When Christ, our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory." (Coloss. 3:4.)

MATTHEW 13:44-50

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and hid. In his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a merchant seeking fine pearls, who having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet, that was cast into the sea, and gathered some fish of every kind, which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach. They sat down, and gathered the good into containers, but the bad they threw away. So will it be in the end of the world. The angels will come forth, and separate the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."

The parable of the "TREASURE hidden in the field," and the "merchant man seeking goodly PEARLS," appear intended to convey one and the same lesson. They vary, no doubt, in one striking particular. The "treasure" was found of one who does not seem to have sought it. The "pearl" was found of one who was actually seeking pearls. But the conduct of the finders, in both cases, was precisely alike. Both "sold all" to make the thing found their own property. And it is exactly at this point that the instruction of both parables agrees.

These two parables are meant to teach us, that men really convinced of the importance of salvation, will give up everything to win Christ, and eternal life.

What was the conduct of the two men our Lord describes? The one was persuaded that there was a "treasure hidden in the field," which would amply repay him, if he bought the field, however great the price that he might give. The other was persuaded that the "pearl" he had found was so immensely valuable, that it would compensate him to purchase it at any cost. Both were convinced that they had found a thing of great value. Both were satisfied that it was worth a great present sacrifice to make this thing their own. Others might wonder at them. Others might think them foolish for paying such a sum of money for the field and pearl. But they knew what they were about. They were sure that they were making a good bargain.

Behold in this single picture, the conduct of a true Christian explained! He is what he is, and does what he does in his religion, because he is thoroughly persuaded that it is worth while. He comes out from the world. He puts off the old man. He forsakes the vain companions of his past life. Like Matthew, he gives up everything, and, like Paul, he "counts all things loss" for Christ's sake. And why? Because he is convinced that Christ will make amends to him for all he gives up. He sees in Christ an endless "treasure." He sees in Christ a precious "pearl." To win Christ he will make any sacrifice. This is true faith. This is the stamp of a genuine work of the Holy Spirit.

Behold in these two parables the real clue to the conduct of many unconverted people! They are what they are in religion, because they are not fully persuaded that it is worth while to be different. They flinch from decision. They shrink from taking up the cross. They halt between two opinions. They will not commit themselves. They will not come forward boldly on the Lord's side. And why? Because they are not convinced that it will compensate them. They are not sure that "the treasure" is before them. They are not satisfied that "the pearl" is worth so great a price. They cannot yet make up their minds to "sell all," that they may win Christ. And so too often they perish everlastingly! When a man will venture nothing for Christ's sake, we must draw the sorrowful conclusion that he has not got the grace of God.

The parable of the NET let down into the sea, has some points in common with that of the wheat and the tares. It is intended to instruct us on a most important subject, the true nature of the visible Church of Christ.

The preaching of the Gospel was the letting down of a large net into the midst of the sea of this world. The professing church which it was to gather together, was to be a mixed body. Within the folds of the net, there were to be fish of every kind, both good and bad. Within the pale of the Church there were to be Christians of various sorts, unconverted as well as converted, false as well

as true. The separation of good and bad is sure to come at last, but not before the end of the world. Such was the account which the great Master gave to His disciples of the churches which they were to found.

It is of the utmost importance to have the lessons of this parable deeply engraved on our minds. There is hardly any point in Christianity on which greater mistakes exist, than the nature of the visible Church. There is none, perhaps, on which mistakes are so perilous to the soul.

Let us LEARN from this parable, that all congregations of professed Christians ought to be regarded as mixed bodies. They are all assemblies containing "good fish and bad," converted and unconverted, children of God and children of the world, and ought to be described and addressed as such. To tell all baptized people, that they are born again, and have the Spirit, and are members of Christ, and are holy, in the face of such a parable as this, is utterly unwarrantable. Such a mode of address may flatter and please. It is not likely to profit or save. It is painfully calculated to promote self-righteousness, and lull sinners to sleep. It overthrows the plain teaching of Christ, and is ruinous to souls. Do we ever hear such doctrine? If we do, let us remember "the net."

Finally, let it be a settled principle with us, never to be satisfied with mere outward church-membership. We may be inside the net, and yet not be in Christ. The waters of baptism are poured on myriads who are never washed in the water of life. The bread and wine are eaten and drunk by thousands at the Lord's table, who never feed on Christ by faith. Are we converted? Are we among the "good fish?" This is the grand question. It is one which must be answered at last. The net will soon be "drawn to shore." The true character of every man's religion will at length be exposed. There will be an eternal separation between the good fish and the bad. There will be a "furnace of fire" for the wicked. Surely, as Baxter says, "these plain words more need belief and consideration than exposition."

MATTHEW 13:51-58

Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?"

They answered him, "Yes, Lord."

He said to them, "Therefore, every scribe who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a householder, who brings out of his treasure new and old things."

It happened that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed from there. Coming into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom, and these mighty works? Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? Aren't all of his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all of these things?" They were offended by him.

But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and in his own house." He didn't do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

The first thing which we ought to notice in these verses, is the striking question with which our Lord winds up the seven wonderful parables of this chapter. He said, "Have you understood all these things?"

Personal application has been called the "soul" of preaching. A sermon without application is like a letter posted without an address. It may be well-written, rightly dated, and duly signed. But it is useless, because it never reaches its destination. Our Lord's inquiry is an admirable example of real heart-searching application, "Have you understood?"

The mere form of hearing a sermon can profit no man, unless he comprehends what it means. He might just as well listen to the blowing of a trumpet, or the beating of a drum. He might just as well attend a Roman Catholic service in Latin. His intellect must be set in motion, and his heart impressed. Ideas must be received into his mind. He must carry off the seeds of new thoughts. Without this he hears in vain.

It is of great importance to see this point clearly. There is a vast amount of ignorance about it. There are thousands who go regularly to places of worship, and think they have done their religious duty, but never carry away an idea, or receive an impression. Ask them, when they return home on a Sunday evening, what they have learned, and they cannot tell you a word. Examine them at the end of a year, as to the religious knowledge they have attained, and you will find them as ignorant as the heathen.

Let us watch our souls in this matter. Let us take with us to Church, not only our bodies, but our minds, our reason, our hearts, and our consciences. Let us often ask ourselves, "What have I got from this sermon? what have I learned? what truths have been impressed on my mind?" Intellect, no doubt, is not everything in religion. But it does not therefore follow that it is nothing at all. The heart is unquestionably the main point. But we must never forget that the

Holy Spirit generally reaches the heart through the mind. Sleepy, idle, inattentive hearers, are never likely to be converted.

The second thing, which we ought to notice in these verses, is the strange treatment which our Lord received in His own country.

He came to the town of Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and "taught in their synagogue." His teaching, no doubt, was the same as it always was. "Never a man spoke like this man." But it had no effect on the people of Nazareth. They were "astonished," but their hearts were unmoved. They said, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?" They despised Him, because they were so familiar with Him. "They were offended in him." And they drew from our Lord the solemn remark, "A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country, and in his own house."

Let us see, in this history, a melancholy page of human nature unfolded to our view. We are all apt to despise mercies, if we are accustomed to them, and have them cheap. The Bibles and religious books, which are so plentiful in England, the means of grace of which we have so abundant a supply, the preaching of the Gospel which we hear every week--all, all are liable to be undervalued. It is mournfully true that in religion, more than in anything else, "familiarity breeds contempt." Men forget that truth is truth, however old and hackneyed it may sound, and despise it because it is old. Alas! by so doing, they provoke God to take it away.

Do we wonder that the relations, servants and neighbors of godly people are not always converted? Do we wonder that the parishioners of eminent ministers of the Gospel are often their hardest and most impenitent hearers? Let us wonder no more. Let us mark the experience of our Lord at Nazareth, and learn wisdom.

Do we ever imagine that if we had only seen and heard Jesus Christ, we would have been His faithful disciples? Do we think that if we had only lived near Him, and been eyewitnesses of His ways, we would not have been undecided, wavering, and half-hearted about religion? If we do, let us think so no longer. Let us observe the people of Nazareth, and learn wisdom.

The last thing which we ought to notice in these verses is the ruinous nature of unbelief. The chapter ends with the fearful words, "He didn't do many miraculous works there, because of their unbelief."

Behold in this single word the secret of the everlasting ruin of multitudes of souls! They perish forever, because they will not believe. There is nothing beside in earth or heaven that prevents their salvation. Their sins, however

many, might all be forgiven. The Father's love is ready to receive them. The blood of Christ is ready to cleanse them. The power of the Spirit is ready to renew them. But a great barrier interposes--they will not believe. "You will not come unto me," says Jesus, "that you might have life." (John 5:40.) May we all be on our guard against this accursed sin. It is the old root-sin, which caused the fall of man. Cut down in the true child of God by the power of the Spirit, it is ever ready to bud and sprout again. There are three great enemies against which God's children should daily pray--pride, worldliness, and unbelief. Of these three, none is greater than unbelief.

Chapter 14

14. The martyrdom of the King’s herald

Verses 1-14. John’s martyrdom

MATTHEW 14:1-12

At that time, Herod the tetrarch heard the report concerning Jesus, and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptizer. He is risen from the dead. That is why these powers work in him." For Herod had laid hold of John, and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For John said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." When he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced among them and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she should ask. She, being prompted by her mother, said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptizer."

The king was grieved, but for the sake of his oaths, and of those who sat at the table with him, he commanded it to be given, and he sent and beheaded John in the prison. His head was brought on a platter, and given to the young lady: and she brought it to her mother. His disciples came, and took the body, and buried it; and they went and told Jesus.

We have in this passage a page out of God's book of martyrs--the history of the death of John the Baptist. The wickedness of king Herod, the bold reproof which John gave him, the consequent imprisonment of the faithful reprover, and the disgraceful circumstances of his death, are all written for our learning. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Psalm 116:15.)

The story of John the Baptist's death is told more fully by Mark than by Matthew. For the present it seems sufficient to draw two general lessons from Matthew's narrative, and to fasten our attention exclusively upon them.

Let us learn, in the first place, from these verses, the great power of conscience.

King Herod hears of "the fame of Jesus," and says to his servants, "This is John the Baptist--he is risen from the dead." He remembered his own wicked dealings with that holy man, and his heart failed within him. His heart told him that he had despised his godly counsel, and committed a foul and abominable murder. And his heart told him, that though he had killed John, there would yet be a reckoning day. He and John the Baptist would yet meet again. Well says Bishop Hall, "a wicked man needs no other tormentor, especially for sins of blood, than his own heart."

There is a conscience in all men by nature. Let this never be forgotten. Fallen, lost, desperately wicked as we are all born into the world, God has taken care to leave Himself a witness in our bosoms. It is a poor blind guide, without the Holy Spirit. It can save no one. It leads no one to Christ. It may be seared and trampled under foot. But there is such a thing as conscience in every man, accusing or excusing him; and Scripture and experience alike declare it. (Rom. 2:15.)

Conscience can make even kings miserable, when they have wilfully rejected its advice. It can fill the princes of this world with fear and trembling, as it did Felix, when Paul preached. They find it easier to imprison and behead the preacher, than to bind his sermon, and silence the voice of his reproof in their own hearts. God's witnesses may be put out of the way, but their testimony often lives and works on, long after they are dead. God's prophets live not forever, but their words often survive them. (2 Tim. 2:9. Zech. 1:5.)

Let the thoughtless and ungodly remember this, and not sin against their consciences. Let them know that their sins will "surely find them out." They may laugh, and jest, and mock at religion for a little time. They may cry, "Who is afraid? What is the mighty harm of our ways?" They may depend upon it, they are sowing misery for themselves, and will reap a bitter crop sooner or later. Their wickedness will overtake them one day. They will find, like Herod, that it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God. (Jerem. 2:19.)

Let ministers and teachers remember that there is a conscience in men, and work on boldly. Instruction is not always thrown away, because it seems to bear

no fruit at the time it is given. Teaching is not always in vain, though we fancy that it is unheeded, wasted, and forgotten. There is a conscience in the hearers of sermons. There is a conscience in the children at our schools. Many a sermon and lesson will yet rise again, when he who preached or taught it is lying, like John the Baptist, in the grave. Thousands know that we are right, and, like Herod, dare not confess it.

Let us learn, in the second place, that God's children must not look for their reward in this world. If ever there was a case of godliness unrewarded in this life, it was that of John the Baptist. Think for a moment what a man he was during his short career, and then think to what an end he came. Behold him, that was the Prophet of the Highest, and greater than any born of woman, imprisoned like a malefactor! Behold him cut off by a violent death, before the age of thirty-four--the burning light quenched--the faithful preacher murdered for doing his duty--and this to gratify the hatred of an adulterous woman, and at the command of a capricious tyrant! Truly there was an event here, if there ever was one in the world, which might make an ignorant man say, "What profit is it to serve God?"

But these are the sort of things which show us, that there will one day be a judgment. The God of the spirits of all flesh shall at last set up an assize, and reward every one according to his works. The blood of John the Baptist, and James the apostle, and Stephen--the blood of Polycarp, and Huss, and Ridley, and Latimer, shall yet be required. It is all written in God's book. "The earth shall disclose her blood, and no more cover her slain." (Isaiah 26:21.) The world shall yet know, that there is a God who judges the earth. "If you see the oppression of the poor, and violent taking away of justice and righteousness in a district, don't marvel at the matter--for one official is eyed by a higher one, and there are officials over them." (Eccles. 5:8.)

Let all true Christians remember, that their best things are yet to come. Let us count it no strange thing, if we have sufferings in this present time. It is a season of probation. We are yet at school. We are learning patience, gentleness, and meekness, which we could hardly learn if we had our good things now. But there is an eternal holiday yet to begin. For this let us wait quietly. It will make amends for all. "Our light affliction which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. 4:17.)

Verses 15-36. Jesus' ministry of mercy

MATTHEW 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat, to a deserted place apart. When the multitudes heard it, they followed him on foot from the cities.

Jesus went out, and he saw a great multitude. He had compassion on them, and healed their sick. When evening had come, his disciples came to him, saying, "This place is deserted, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food."

But Jesus said to them, "They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat."

They told him, "We only have here five loaves and two fish."

He said, "Bring them here to me." He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass; and he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave to the multitudes. They all ate, and were filled. They took up twelve baskets full of that which remained left over from the broken pieces. Those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

These verses contain one of our Lord Jesus Christ's greatest miracles, the feeding of "five thousand men, besides women and children," with five loaves and two fish. Of all the miracles worked by our Lord, not one is so often mentioned in the New Testament as this. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all dwell upon it. It is plain that this event in our Lord's history is intended to receive special attention. Let us give it that attention, and see what we may learn.

In the first place, this miracle is an unanswerable proof of our Lord's divine POWER. To satisfy the hunger of more than five thousand people with so small a portion of food as five loaves and two fish, would be manifestly impossible without a supernatural multiplication of the food. It was a thing that no magician, impostor, or false prophet would ever have attempted. Such a person might possibly pretend to cure a single sick person, or raise a single dead body--and by jugglery and trickery might persuade weak people that he succeeded. But such a person would never attempt such a mighty work as that which is here recorded. He would know well that he could not persuade ten thousand men,

women, and children that they were full when they were hungry. He would be exposed as a cheat and impostor on the spot.

Yet this is the mighty work which our Lord actually performed, and by performing it gave a conclusive proof that He was God. He called that into being which did not before exist. He provided visible, tangible, material food for ten thousand people, out of a supply which in itself would not have satisfied fifty. Surely we must be blind if we do not see in this the hand of Him "who provides food for all flesh," and made the world and all that therein is. To create is the peculiar prerogative of God.

We ought to lay firm hold on such passages as this. We should treasure up in our minds every evidence of our Lord's divine power. The cold, orthodox, unconverted man may see little in the story. The true believer should store it in his memory. Let him think of the world, the devil, and his own heart, and learn to thank God that his Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, is almighty.

In the second place, this miracle is a striking example of our Lord's COMPASSION toward men. He saw a great company in a desert place, ready to faint for hunger. He knew that many in that company had no true faith and love towards Himself. They followed Him from fashion and curiosity, or some equally low motive. (John 6:26.) But our Lord had pity upon all. All were relieved. All partook of the food miraculously provided. All were "filled," and none went away hungry. Let us see in this the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ towards sinners. He is as He was of old, "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, patient, and abundant in goodness and truth." (Exod. 34:6.) He does not deal with men according to their sins, or reward them according to their iniquities. He loads even His enemies with benefits. None will be so excuseless as those who are found impenitent at last. The Lord's goodness leads them to repentance. (Rom. 2:4.) In all His dealings with men on earth, He showed himself one that "delights in mercy." (Micah 7:18.) Let us strive to be like Him. "We ought," says Quesnel, "to have abundance of pity and compassion on diseased souls."

In the last place, this miracle is a lively emblem of the sufficiency of the Gospel to meet the soul-needs of all mankind. There can be little doubt that all our Lord's miracles have a deep figurative meaning, and teach great spiritual truths. But they must be handled reverently and discreetly. Care must be taken that we do not, like many of the Fathers, see allegories where the Holy Spirit meant none to be seen. But perhaps, if there is any miracle which has a manifest figurative meaning, in addition to the plain lessons which may be drawn from its surface, it is that which is now before us.

What does this hungry multitude in a desert place represent to us? It is an emblem of all mankind. The children of men are a large assembly of perishing sinners, famishing in the midst of a wilderness world--helpless, hopeless, and on the way to ruin. We have all gone astray like lost sheep. (Isaiah. 53:6.) We are by nature far away from God. Our eyes may not be opened to the full extent of our danger. But in reality we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. (Rev. 3:17.) There is but a step between us and everlasting death.

What do these loaves and fish represent, apparently so inadequate to meet the necessities of the case, but by miracle made sufficient to feed ten thousand people? They are an emblem of the doctrine of Christ crucified for sinners, as their vicarious substitute, and making atonement by His death for the sin of the world. That doctrine seems to the natural man weakness itself. Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. (1 Cor. 1:23.) And yet Christ crucified has proved the bread of God which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world. (John 6:33.) The story of the cross has amply met the spiritual needs of mankind wherever it has been preached. Thousands of every rank, age, and nation, are witnesses that it is "the wisdom of God, and the power of God." They have eaten of it and been "filled." They have found it "food indeed and drink indeed."

Let us ponder these things well. There are great depths in all our Lord Jesus Christ's recorded dealings upon earth, which no one has ever fully fathomed. There are mines of rich instruction in all His words and ways, which no one has thoroughly explored. Many a passage of the Gospels is like the cloud which Elijah's servant saw. (1 Kings 18:44.) The more we look at it, the greater it will appear. There is an inexhaustible fullness in Scripture. Other writings seem comparatively threadbare when we become familiar with them. But as to Scripture, the more we read it, the richer we shall find it.

MATTHEW 14:22-36

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat, and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. After he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain by himself to pray. When evening had come, he was there alone. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, distressed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It's a spirit!" and they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying "Cheer up! It is I! Don't be afraid."

Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters."

He said, "Come!"

Peter stepped down from the boat, and walked on the waters to come to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was strong, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got up into the boat, the wind ceased. Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him, saying, "You are truly the Son of God!"

When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. When the people of that place recognized him, they sent into all that surrounding region, and brought to him all who were sick, and they begged him that they might just touch the fringe of his garment. As many as touched it were made whole.

The history contained in these verses, is one of singular interest. The miracle here recorded brings out in strong light the character both of Christ and His people. The power and mercy of the Lord Jesus, and the mixture of faith and unbelief in His best disciples, are beautifully illustrated.

We learn, in the first place, from this miracle, what absolute dominion our Saviour has over all created things. We see Him "walking on the sea," as if it was dry land. Those angry waves which tossed the ship of His disciples to and fro, obey the Son of God, and become a solid floor under His feet. That liquid surface, which was agitated by the least breath of wind, bears up the feet of our Redeemer, like a rock. To our poor, weak minds, the whole event is utterly incomprehensible. The picture of two feet walking on the sea, is said by Doddridge to have been the Egyptian emblem of an impossible thing. The man of science will tell us, that for material flesh and blood to walk on water is a physical impossibility. Enough for us to know that it was done. Enough for us to remember, that to Him who created the seas at the beginning, it must have been perfectly easy to walk over their waves when He pleased.

There is encouragement here for all true Christians. Let them know that there is nothing created, which is not under Christ's control. "All things serve Him." He may allow His people to be tried for a season, and tossed to and fro by storms of trouble. He may be later than they wish in coming to their aid, and not draw near until the "fourth watch of the night." But never let them forget that winds, and waves, and storms are all Christ's servants. They cannot move

without Christ's permission. "The Lord on high is mightier than the voice of many waters, yes than the mighty waves of the sea." (Psalm 93:4.) Are we ever tempted to cry with Jonah, "the flood was all around me. All your waves and your billows passed over me." (Jonah 2:3.) Let us remember they are "His" billows. Let us wait patiently. We may yet see Jesus coming to us, and "walking on the sea."

We learn, in the second place, from this miracle, what power Jesus can bestow on those who believe on Him. We see Simon Peter coming down out of the ship, and walking on the water, like His Lord. What a wonderful proof was this of our Lord's divinity! To walk on the sea Himself was a mighty miracle. But to enable a poor weak disciple to do the same, was a mightier miracle still.

There is a deep meaning in this part of our history. It shows us what great things our Lord can do for those that hear His voice, and follow Him. He can enable them to do things which at one time they would have thought impossible. He can carry them through difficulties and trials, which without Him they would never have dared to face. He can give them strength to walk through fire and water unharmed, and to get the better of every foe. Moses in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, the saints in Nero's household, are all examples of His mighty power. Let us fear nothing, if we are in the path of duty. The waters may seem deep. But if Jesus says, "Come," we have no cause to be afraid. "He who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also, and greater works than these will he do." (John 14:12.)

Let us learn, in the third place, from this miracle, how much trouble disciples bring on themselves by unbelief. We see Peter walking boldly on the water for a little way. But by and bye, when be sees "the wind was strong," he is afraid, and begins to sink. The weak flesh gets the better of the willing spirit. He forgets the wonderful proofs of his Lord's goodness and power, which he had just received. He considered not that the same Savior who had enabled him to walk one step, must be able to hold him up forever. He did not reflect that he was nearer to Christ when once on the water, than he was when he first left the ship. Fear took away his memory. Alarm confused his reason. He thought of nothing but the winds and waves and his immediate danger, and his faith gave way. "Lord," He cried, "save me."

What a lively picture we have here of the experience of many a believer! How many there are who have faith enough to take the first step in following Christ, but not faith enough to go on as they begun. They take fright at the trials and dangers which seem to be in their way. They look at the enemies that surround them, and the difficulties that seem likely to beset their path. They

dwell on them more than on Jesus, and at once their feet begin to sink. Their hearts faint within them. Their hope vanishes away. Their comforts disappear. And why is all this? Christ is not altered. Their enemies are not greater than they were. It is just because, like Peter, they have ceased to look to Jesus, and have given way to unbelief. They are taken up with thinking about their enemies, instead of thinking about Christ. May we lay this to heart, and learn wisdom.

Let us learn, in the last place, from this miracle, how merciful our Lord Jesus Christ is to weak believers. We see Him stretching forth His hand immediately to save Peter, as soon as Peter cried to Him. He does not leave him to reap the fruit of his own unbelief, and sink in the deep waters. He only seems to consider his trouble, and to think of nothing so much as delivering him from it. The only word He utters, is the gentle reproof, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Behold in this concluding part of the miracle, the exceeding "gentleness of Christ!" He can bear with much, and forgive much, when He sees true grace in a man's heart. As a mother deals gently with her infant, and does not cast it away because of its little waywardness and frowardness, so does the Lord Jesus deal gently with His people. He loved and pitied them before conversion, and after conversion He loves and pities them still more. He knows their feebleness, and bears long with them. He would have us know that doubting does not prove that a man has no faith, but only that his faith is small. And even when our faith is small, the Lord is ready to help us. "When I said, my foot is slipping, your loving-kindness, O Lord, held me up." (Psalm. 94:18.)

How much there is in all this to encourage men to serve Christ! Where is the man that ought to be afraid to begin running the Christian race, with such a Savior as Jesus? If we fall, He will raise us again. If we err, He will bring us back. But His mercy shall never be altogether taken from us. He has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," and He will keep His word. May we only remember, that while we do not despise little faith, we must not sit down content with it. Our prayer must ever be, "Lord, increase our faith."



Some believe Jesus was transfigured on Mount Tabor

Chapter 15

15. Further ministry of the rejected King

Verses 1-20. His denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees

MATTHEW 15:1-9

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying,"Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the elders? For they don't wash their hands when they eat bread."

He answered them, "Why do you also disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, 'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever may tell his father or his mother, "Whatever help you might otherwise have gotten from me is a gift devoted to God," he shall not honor his father or mother.' You have made the commandment of God void because of your tradition. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 'These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honour me with

their lips; but their heart is far from me. And in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine rules made by men.'"

We have in these verses a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ, and certain Scribes and Pharisees. The subject of it may seem, at first sight, of little interest in modern days. But it is not so in reality. The principles of the Pharisees are principles that never die. There are truths laid down here, which are of deep importance.

We learn, for one thing, that hypocrites generally attach great importance to mere outward things in religion.

The complaint of the Scribes and Pharisees in this place, is a striking case in point. They brought an accusation to our Lord against His disciples. But what was its nature? It was not that they were covetous or self-righteous. It was not that they were untruthful or uncharitable. It was not that they had broken any part of the law of God. But they "disobey the tradition of the elders. They don't wash their hands when they eat bread." They did not observe some rule of mere human authority, which some old Jew had invented! This was the head and front of their offence!

Do we see nothing of the spirit of the Pharisees in the present day? Unhappily we see only too much. There are thousands of professing Christians, who seem to care nothing about the religion of their neighbors, provided that it agrees in outward matters with their own. Does their neighbor worship according to their particular form? Can he repeat their shibboleth, and talk a little about their favorite doctrines? If he can, they are satisfied, though there is no evidence that he is converted. If he cannot, they are always finding fault, and cannot speak peaceably of him, though he may be serving Christ better than themselves. Let us beware of this spirit. It is the very essence of hypocrisy. Let our principle be--"the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17.)

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, the great danger of attempting to add anything to the word of God. Whenever a man takes upon him to make additions to the Scriptures, he is likely to end with valuing his own additions above Scripture itself.

We see this point brought out most strikingly in our Lord's answer to the charge of the Pharisees against His disciples. He says, "Why do you disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition?" He strikes boldly at the whole system of adding anything, as needful to salvation, to God's perfect word. He

exposes the mischievous tendency of the system by an example. He shows how the vaunted traditions of the Pharisees were actually destroying the authority of the fifth commandment. In short, He establishes the great truth, which ought never be forgotten, that there is an inherent tendency in all traditions, to "make the commandment of God void." The authors of these traditions may have meant no such thing. Their intentions may have been pure. But that there is a tendency in all religious institutions of mere human authority, to usurp the authority of God's word, is evidently the doctrine of Christ. It is a solemn remark of Bucer's, that "a man is rarely to be found, who pays an excessive attention to human inventions in religion, who does not put more trust in them than in the grace of God."

And have we not seen melancholy proof of this truth, in the history of the Church of Christ? Unhappily we have seen only too much. As Baxter says, "men think God's laws too many and too strict, and yet make more of their own, and are precise for keeping them." Have we never read how some have exalted canons, rubrics, and ecclesiastical laws above the word of God, and punished disobedience to them with far greater severity than open sins, like drunkenness and swearing? Have we never heard of the extravagant importance which the Church of Rome attaches to monastic vows, and vows of celibacy, and keeping feasts and fasts; insomuch that she seems to place them far above family duties, and the ten commandments? Have we never heard of men who make more ado about eating meat in Lent, than about gross impurity of life, or murder? Have we never observed in our own land, how many seem to make adherence to Episcopacy the weightiest matter in Christianity, and to regard "Churchmanship," as they call it, as far outweighing repentance, faith, holiness, and the graces of the Spirit?

These are questions which can only receive one sorrowful answer. The spirit of the Pharisees still lives, after eighteen hundred years. The disposition to "make the commandment of God void by traditions," is to be found among Christians, as well as among Jews. The tendency practically to exalt man's inventions above God's Word, is still fearfully prevalent. May we watch against it, and be on our guard! May we remember that no tradition or man-made institution in religion can ever excuse the neglect of relative duties, or justify disobedience to any plain commandment of God's Word.

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, that the religious worship which God desires, is the worship of the heart. We find our Lord establishing this by a quotation from Isaiah, "This people draws near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

The heart is the principal thing in the relation of husband and wife, of friend and friend, of parent and child. The heart must be the principal point to which we attend in all the relations between God and our souls. What is the first thing we need, in order to be Christians? A new heart. What is the sacrifice God asks us to bring to him? A broken and a contrite heart. What is the true circumcision? The circumcision of the heart. What is genuine obedience? To obey from the heart. What is saving faith? To believe with the heart. Where ought Christ to dwell? To dwell in our hearts by faith. What is the chief request that Wisdom makes to every one? "My son, give me your heart."

Let us leave the passage with honest self-inquiry as to the state of our own hearts. Let us settle it in our minds, that all formal worship of God, whether in public or private, is utterly in vain, so long as our "hearts are far from Him." The bended knee, the bowed head, the loud amen, the daily chapter, the regular attendance at the Lord's table, are all useless and unprofitable, so long as our affections are nailed to sin, or pleasure, or money, or the world. The question of our Lord must yet be answered satisfactorily, before we can be saved. He says to every one, "Do you love me?" (John 21:17.)

MATTHEW 15:10-20

He summoned the multitude, and said to them, "Hear, and understand. That which enters into the mouth doesn't defile the man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."

Then the disciples came, and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended, when they heard this saying?"

But he answered, "Every plant which my heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted. Leave them alone. They are blind guides of the blind. If the blind guide the blind, both will fall into a pit."

Peter answered him, "Explain the parable to us."

So Jesus said, "Do you also still not understand? Don't you understand that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the belly, and then out of the body? But the things which proceed out of the mouth come out of the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands doesn't defile the man."

There are two striking sayings of the Lord Jesus in this passage. One respects false doctrine. The other respects the human heart. Both of them deserve the closest attention.

Respecting FALSE DOCTRINE, our Lord declares, that it is a duty to oppose it, that its final destruction is sure, and that its teachers ought to be forsaken. He says, "Every plant which my heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted. Leave them alone."

It is clear from examination of the passage, that the disciples were surprised at our Lord's strong language about the Pharisees and their traditions. They had probably been accustomed from their youth to regard them as the wisest and best of men. They were startled to hear their Master denouncing them as hypocrites, and charging them with transgressing the commandment of God. "Do you know," they said, "that the Pharisees were offended." To this question we are indebted for our Lord's explanatory declaration--a declaration which perhaps has never received the notice it deserves.

The plain meaning of our Lord's words is, that false doctrine like that of the Pharisees, was a plant to which no mercy should be shown. It was a "plant which His heavenly Father had not planted," and a plant which it was a duty to root up, whatever offence it might cause. It was no charity to spare it, because it was injurious to the souls of men. It mattered nothing that those who planted it were high in office, or learned. If it contradicted the word of God, it ought to be opposed, refuted, and rejected. His disciples must therefore understand that it was right to resist all teaching that was unscriptural, and to "let alone," and forsake all instructors who persisted in it. Sooner or later they would find that all false doctrine will be completely overthrown, and put to shame, and nothing shall stand but that which is built on the word of God.

There are lessons of deep wisdom in this saying of our Lord, which serve to throw light on the duty of many a professing Christian. Let us scan them well, and see what they are. It was practical obedience to this saying which produced the blessed Protestant Reformation. Its lessons deserve close attention.

Do we not see here the duty of boldness in resisting false teaching? Beyond doubt we do. No fear of giving offence, no dread of ecclesiastical censure, should make us hold our peace, when God's truth is in peril. If we are true followers of our Lord, we ought to be outspoken, unflinching witnesses against error. "Truth," says Musculus, "must not be suppressed because men are wicked and blind."

Do we not see again the duty of forsaking false teachers, if they will not give up their delusions? Beyond doubt we do. No false delicacy, no mock humility should make us shrink from leaving the ministrations of any minister who contradicts God's word. It is at our peril if we submit to unscriptural teaching. Our blood will be on our own heads. To use the words of Whitby, "It never can be right to follow the blind into the ditch."

Do we not see, in the last place, the duty of patience, when we see false teaching abound? Beyond doubt we do. We may take comfort in the thought that it will not stand long. God Himself will defend the cause of His own truth. Sooner or later every heresy "shall be rooted up." We are not to fight with carnal weapons, but wait, and preach, and protest, and pray. Sooner or later, as Wycliffe said, "the truth shall prevail."

Respecting the HEART OF MAN, our Lord declares in these verses, that it is the true source of all sin and defilement. The Pharisees taught that holiness depended on foods and drinks, on bodily washings and purification. They held that all who observed their traditions on these matters were pure and clean in God's sight, and that all who neglected them were impure and unclean. Our Lord overthrew this miserable doctrine, by showing His disciples that the real fountain of all defilement was not outside a man, but within. "Out of the heart," He says, "come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies. These are the things which defile the man." He that would serve God aright needs something far more important than bodily washings. He must seek to have "a clean heart."

What an dreadful picture we have here of human nature, and drawn too by one who knew what was in man. What a fearful catalogue is this of the contents of our own bosoms! What a melancholy list of seeds of evil our Lord has exposed, lying deep down within every one of us, and ready at any time to start into active life! What can the proud and self-righteous say, when they read such a passage as this? This is no sketch of the heart of a robber, or murderer. It is the true and faithful account of the hearts of all mankind. May God grant that we may ponder it well and learn wisdom!

Let it be a settled resolution with us, that in all our religion the state of our hearts shall be the main thing. Let it not content us to go to church, and observe the forms of religion. Let us look far deeper than this, and desire to have a "heart right in the sight of God." (Acts 8:21.) The right heart is a heart sprinkled with the blood of Christ, and renewed by the Holy Spirit, and purified by faith. Never let us rest until we find within the witness of the Spirit, that God has created in us a clean heart, and made all things new. (Psalm 51:10. 2 Cor. 5:17.)

Finally, let it be a settled resolution with us to "keep our hearts with all diligence," all the days of our lives. (Prov. 4:23.) Even after renewal they are weak. Even after putting on the new man they are deceitful. Let us never forget that our chief danger is from within. The world and the devil combined, cannot do us so much harm as our own hearts will, if we do not watch and pray. Happy is he who remembers daily the words of Solomon, "One who trusts in himself is a fool." (Prov. 28:26.)

Verses 21-28. He ministers to a Gentile

MATTHEW 15:21-28

Jesus went out from there, and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. Behold, a Canaanite woman came out from those borders, and cried, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, you son of David! My daughter is severely demonized!"

But he answered her not a word.

His disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away; for she cries after us."

But he answered, "I wasn't sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

But she came and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, help me."

But he answered, "It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

But she said, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that hour.

Another of our Lord's miracles is recorded in these verses. The circumstances which attend it are peculiarly full of interest. Let us take them up in order, and see what they are. Every word in these narratives is rich in instruction.

We see, in the first place, that true faith may sometimes be found, where it might have been least expected.

A Caananitish woman cries to our Lord for help, on behalf of her daughter. "Have mercy on me," she says, "Lord, Son of David." Such a prayer would have showed great faith, had she lived in Bethany, or Jerusalem. But when we find that she came from the "coasts of Tyre and Sidon," such a prayer may well fill us with surprise. It ought to teach us, that it is grace, not place, which makes people believers. We may live in a prophet's family, like Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, and yet continue impenitent, unbelieving, and fond of the world. We may dwell in the midst of superstition and dark idolatry, like the little maid in Naaman's house, and yet be faithful witnesses for God and His Christ. Let us not despair of any one's soul, merely because his lot is cast in an unfavorable position. It is possible to dwell in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and yet sit down in the kingdom of God.

We see, in the second place, that affliction sometimes proves a blessing to a person's soul.

This Caananitish mother no doubt had been severely tried. She had seen her darling child vexed with a devil, and been unable to relieve her. But yet that trouble brought her to Christ, and taught her to pray. Without it she might have lived and died in careless ignorance, and never seen Jesus at all. Surely it was good for her that she was afflicted. (Psalm 119:71.)

Let us mark this well. There is nothing which shows our ignorance so much as our impatience under trouble. We forget that every cross is a message from God, and intended to do us good in the end. Trials are intended to make us think--to wean us from the world, to send us to the Bible, to drive us to our knees. Health is a good thing; but sickness is far better, if it leads us to God. Prosperity is a great mercy, but adversity is a greater one, if it brings us to Christ. Anything, anything is better than living in carelessness, and dying in sin. Better a thousand times be afflicted, like the Canaanitish mother, and like her flee to Christ, than live at ease, like the rich "fool," and die at last without Christ and without hope. (Luke 12:20.)

We see, in the third place, that Christ's people are often less gracious and compassionate than Christ Himself.

The woman about whom we are reading, found small favor with our Lord's disciples. Perhaps they regarded an inhabitant of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, as unworthy of their Master's help. At any rate they said, "Send her away."

There is only too much of this spirit among many who profess and call themselves believers. They are apt to discourage inquirers after Christ, instead

of helping them forward. They are too ready to doubt the reality of a beginner's grace, because it is small, and to treat him as Saul was treated when he first came to Jerusalem after his conversion. "They did not believe that he was a disciple." (Acts 9:26.) Let us beware of giving way to this spirit. Let us seek to have more of the mind that was in Christ. Like Him let us be gentle, and kind, and encouraging in all our treatment of those who are seeking to be saved. Above all, let us tell men continually that they must not judge of Christ by Christians. Let us assure those who there is far more in that gracious Master, than there is in the best of His servants. Peter, and James, and John may say to the afflicted soul, "Send her away." But such a word never came from the lips of Christ. He may sometimes keep us long waiting, as He did this woman. But He will never send us empty away.

We see, in the last place, what encouragement there is to persevere in prayer, both for ourselves and others.

It is hard to conceive a more striking illustration of this truth, than we have in this passage. The prayer of this afflicted mother at first seemed entirely unnoticed--Jesus "answered her not a word." Yet she prayed on. The answer which by and bye fell from our Lord's lips sounded discouraging--"I wasn't sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Yet she prayed on, "Lord, help me." The second answer of our Lord was even less encouraging than the first--"It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Yet "hope deferred" did not "make her heart sick." (Prov. 13:12.) Even then she was not silenced. Even then she finds a plea for some "crumbs" of mercy to be granted to her. And her importunity obtained at length a gracious reward. "Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire." That promise never yet was broken, "Seek and you shall find." (Matt. 7:7.)

Let us remember this history, when we pray for ourselves. We are sometimes tempted to think that we get no good by our prayers, and that we may as well give them up altogether. Let us resist the temptation. It comes from the devil. Let us believe, and pray on. Against our besetting sins, against the spirit of the world, against the wiles of the devil, let us pray on, and not faint. For strength to do duty, for grace to bear our trials, for comfort in every trouble, let us continue in prayer. Let us be sure that no time is so well-spent in every day, as that which we spend upon our knees. Jesus hears us, and in his own good time will give an answer.

Let us remember this history, when we intercede for others. Have we children, whose conversion we desire? Have we relatives and friends, about whose salvation we are anxious? Let us follow the example of this Canaanitish

woman, and lay the state of their souls before Christ. Let us name their names before Him night and day, and never rest until we have an answer. We may have to wait many a long year. We may seem to pray in vain, and intercede without profit. But let us never give up. Let us believe that Jesus is not changed, and that He who heard the Canaanitish mother, and granted her request, will also hear us, and one day give us an answer of peace.

Verses 29-39. He ministers to the multitudes

MATTHEW 15:29-39

Jesus departed there, and came near to the sea of Galilee; and he went up into the mountain, and sat there. Great multitudes came to him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others, and they put them down at his feet. He healed them, so that the multitude wondered when they saw the mute speaking, injured whole, lame walking, and blind seeing--and they glorified the God of Israel.

Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat. I don't want to send them away fasting, or they might faint on the way."

The disciples said to him, "Where should we get so many loaves in a deserted place as to satisfy so great a multitude?"

Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?"

They said, "Seven, and a few small fish."

He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves and the fish. He gave thanks and broke them, and gave to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. They all ate, and were filled. They took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces that were left over. Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. Then he sent away the multitudes, got into the boat, and came into the borders of Magdala.

The beginning of this passage contains three points which deserve our special attention. For the present let us dwell exclusively on them.

In the first place, let us remark, how much more pain people take about the relief of their bodily diseases, than about their souls. We read, that "great multitudes came to him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others." Many of them, no doubt, had journeyed many miles, and gone

through great fatigues. Nothing is so difficult and troublesome, as to move sick people. But the hope of being healed was in sight. Such hope is everything to a sick man.

We know little of human nature, if we wonder at the conduct of these people. We need not wonder at all. They felt that health was the greatest of earthly blessings. They felt that pain was the hardest of all trials to bear. There is no arguing against sense. A man feels his strength failing. He sees his body wasting, and his face becoming pale. He is sensible that his appetite is leaving him. He knows, in short, that he is ill, and needs a physician. Show him a physician within reach, who is said never to fail in working cures, and he will go to him without delay.

Let us however not forget that our souls are far more diseased than our bodies, and learn a lesson from the conduct of these people. Our souls are afflicted with a malady far more deep-seated, far more complicated, far more hard to cure than any ailment that flesh is heir to. They are in fact plague-stricken by sin. They must be healed, and healed effectually, or perish everlastingly. Do we really know this? Do we feel it? Are we alive to our spiritual disease? Alas! there is but one answer to these questions. The bulk of mankind do not feel it at all. Their eyes are blinded. They are utterly insensible to their danger. For bodily health they crowd the waiting-rooms of doctors. For bodily health they take long journeys to find purer air. But for their soul's health they take no thought at all. Happy indeed is that man or woman who has found out his soul's disease! Such an one will never rest until he has found Jesus. Troubles will seem nothing to him. Life, life, eternal life is at stake. He will count all things loss that he may win Christ, and be healed.

In the second place, let us remark the marvellous ease and power with which our Lord healed all who were brought to Him. We read that "the multitude wondered when they saw the mute speaking, injured whole, lame walking, and blind seeing--and they glorified the God of Israel."

Behold in these words a lively emblem of our Lord Jesus Christ's power to heal sin-diseased souls! There is no ailment of heart that He cannot cure. There is no form of spiritual complaint that He cannot overcome. The fever of lust, the palsy of the love of the world, the slow consumption of indolence and sloth, the heart-disease of unbelief, all, all give way when he sends forth His Spirit on any one of the children of men. He can put a new song in a sinner's mouth, and make him speak with love of that Gospel which he once ridiculed and blasphemed. He can open the eyes of a man's understanding and make him see the kingdom of God. He can open the ears of a man and make him willing to hear His voice, and

follow Him wherever He goes. He can give power to a man who once walked in the broad way that leads unto destruction, to walk in the way of life. He can make hands that were once instruments of sin, serve Him and do His will. The time of miracles is not yet past. Every conversion is a miracle. Have we ever seen a real instance of conversion? Let us know that we saw in it the hand of Christ. We should have seen nothing really greater, if we had seen our Lord making the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk, when He was on earth.

Would we know what to do, if we desire to be saved? Do we feel soul-sick and want a cure? We must just go to Christ by faith and apply to Him for relief. He is not changed. Eighteen hundred years have made no difference in Him. High at the right hand of God He is still the great Physician. He still "receives sinners." He is still mighty to heal.

In the third place, let us remark the abundant compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read that Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "I have compassion on the multitude." A great crowd of men and women is always a solemn sight. It should stir our hearts to feel that each is a dying sinner, and each has a soul to be saved. None ever seems to have felt so much when he saw a crowd, as Christ.

It is a curious and striking fact that of all the feelings experienced by our Lord when upon earth, there is none so often mentioned as "compassion." His joy, His sorrow, His thankfulness, His anger, His wonder, His zeal, are all occasionally recorded. But none of these feelings are so frequently mentioned as "compassion." The Holy Spirit seems to point out to us, that this was the distinguishing feature of His character, and the predominant feeling of His mind, when He was among men. Nine times over--to say nothing of expressions in parables--nine times over the Spirit has caused that word "compassion" to be written in the Gospels.

There is something very touching and instructive in this circumstance. Nothing is written by chance, in the word of God. There is a special reason for the selection of every single expression. That word "compassion," no doubt, was specially chosen for our profit.

It ought to encourage all who are hesitating about beginning to walk in God's ways. Let them remember that their Saviour is full of "compassion." He will receive them graciously. He will forgive them freely. He will remember their former iniquities no more. He will abundantly supply all their needs. Let them not be afraid. Christ's mercy is a deep well, of which no one ever found the bottom.

It ought to comfort the saints and servants of the Lord when they feel weary. Let them call to mind that Jesus is full of "compassion." He knows what a world it is in which they live. He knows the body of a man and all its frailties. He knows the devices of their enemy, the devil. And the Lord pities His people. Let them not be cast down. They may feel that weakness, failure, and imperfection are stamped on all they do. But let them not forget that word which says, "His compassions fail not." (Lam. 3:22.)

Chapter 16

16. The rejected King predicts His death

Verses 1-12. The leaven of the scribes and Pharisees

MATTHEW 16:1-12

The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing him, asked him to show them a sign from heaven. But he answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' In the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but you can't discern the signs of the times! An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there will be no sign given to it, except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

He left them, and departed. The disciples came to the other side and had forgotten to take bread. Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

They reasoned among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread."

Jesus, perceiving it, said, "Why do you reason among yourselves, you of little faith, 'because you have brought no bread?' Don't you yet perceive, neither remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you took up? How is it that you don't perceive that I didn't speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Then they understood that he didn't tell them to beware of the yeast of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

In these verses we find our Lord assailed by the untiring enmity of the Pharisees and Sadducees. As a general rule these two sects were at enmity between themselves. In persecuting Christ, however, they made common cause.

Truly it was an unholy alliance! Yet how often we see the same thing in the present day. Men of the most opposite opinions and habits will agree in disliking the Gospel, and will work together to oppose its progress. "There is no new thing under the sun." (Eccles. 1:9.)

The first point in this passage which deserves special notice, is the repetition which our Lord makes of words used by Him on a former occasion. He says, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there will be no sign given to it, except the sign of the prophet Jonah." If we turn to the twelfth chapter of this Gospel and the 39th verse, we shall find that He had said the very same thing once before.

This repetition may seem a trifling and unimportant matter in the eyes of some. But it is not so in reality. It throws light on a subject, which has perplexed the minds of many sincere lovers of the Bible, and ought therefore to be specially observed.

This repetition shows us that our Lord was in the habit of saying the same things over again. He did not content Himself with saying a thing once, and afterwards never repeating it. It is evident that it was His custom to bring forward certain truths again and again, and thus to impress them more deeply on the minds of His disciples. He knew the weakness of our memories in spiritual things. He knew that what we hear twice, we remember better than what we hear once. He therefore brought out of His treasury old things as well as new.

Now what does all this teach us? It teaches us that we need not be so anxious to harmonize the narratives we read in the four Gospels, as many are disposed to be. It does not follow that the sayings of our Lord, which we find the same in Matthew and Luke, were always used at the same time, or that the events with which they are connected must necessarily be the same. Matthew may be describing one event in our Lord's life. Luke may be describing another. And yet the words of our Lord, on both occasions, may have been precisely alike. To attempt to make out the two events to be one and the same, because of the sameness of the words used, has often led Bible students into great difficulties. It is far safer to hold the view here maintained, that at different times our Lord often used the same words.

The second point which deserves special notice in these verses is, the solemn warning which our Lord takes occasion to give to His disciples. His mind was evidently pained with the false doctrines which He saw among the Jews, and the pernicious influence which they exercised. He seizes the opportunity to utter a

caution. "Take heed and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Let us mark well what those words contain.

To whom was this warning addressed? To the twelve apostles--to the first ministers of the Church of Christ--to men who had forsaken all for the Gospel's sake! Even they are warned! The best of men are only men, and at any time may fall into temptation. "Let him who thinks he stands be careful that he doesn't fall." If we love life, and would see good days, let us never think that we do not need that hint, "take heed, and beware."

Against what does our Lord warn His apostles? Against the "doctrine" of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. The Pharisees, we are frequently told in the Gospels, were self-righteous formalists. The Sadducees were skeptics, freethinkers, and half infidels. Yet even Peter, James, and John must beware of their doctrines! Truly the best and holiest of believers may well be on his guard!

By what figure does our Lord describe the false doctrines against which He cautions His disciples? He calls them yeast. Like yeast, they might seem a small thing compared to the whole body of truth. Like yeast, once admitted they would work secretly and noiselessly. Like yeast, they would gradually change the whole character of the religion with which they were mixed. How much is often contained in a single word! It was not merely the open danger of heresy, but "yeast," of which the apostles were to beware.

There is much in all this that calls loudly for the close attention of all professing Christians. The caution of our Lord in this passage has been shamefully neglected. It would have been well for the church of Christ, if the warnings of the Gospel had been as much studied as its promises.

Let us then remember that this saying of our Lord's about the "yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" was intended for all time. It was not meant only for the generation to which it was spoken. It was meant for the perpetual benefit of the Church of Christ. He who spoke it saw with prophetical eye the future history of Christianity. The Great Physician knew well that Pharisee-doctrines and Sadducee-doctrines would prove the two great wasting diseases of His Church, until the end of the world. He would have us know that there will always be Pharisees and Sadducees in the ranks of Christians. Their succession shall never fail. Their generation shall never become extinct. Their name may change, but their spirit will always remain. Therefore He cries to us, "take heed and beware."

Finally, let us make a personal use of this caution, by keeping up a holy jealousy over our own souls. Let us remember, that we live in a world where Pharisaism and Sadduceeism are continually striving for the mastery in the Church of Christ. Some want to ADD to the Gospel, and some want to TAKE AWAY from it. Some would bury it, and some would pare it down to nothing. Some would stifle it by heaping on additions, and some would bleed it to death by subtraction from its truths. Both parties agree only in one respect. Both would kill and destroy the life of Christianity, if they succeeded in having their own way. Against both errors let us watch and pray, and stand upon our guard. Let us not add to the Gospel, to please the Roman Catholic Pharisee. Let us not subtract from the Gospel, to please the Neologian Sadducee. Let our principle be "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," nothing added to it, and nothing taken away.

Verses 13-19. Peter's confession

MATTHEW 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

They said, "Some say John the Baptizer, some, Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and all the powers

of hell will not conquer it. I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven." Then he charged the disciples that they should tell no one that he is Jesus the Christ.

There are words in this passage which have led to painful differences and divisions among Christians. Men have striven and contended about their meaning, until they have lost sight of all charity, and yet failed to carry conviction to one another's minds. Let it suffice us to glance briefly at the controverted words, and then pass on to more practical lessons.

What, then are we to understand, when we read that remarkable saying of our Lord's, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church?" Does it mean that the apostle Peter himself was to be the foundation on which Christ's Church was to be built? Such an interpretation, to say the least, appears exceedingly improbable. To speak of an erring, fallible child of Adam as the foundation of the spiritual temple is very unlike the ordinary language of Scripture. Above all, no reason can be given why our Lord should not have said, "I will build my church upon you,"--if such had been His meaning, instead of saying, "On this rock I will build my church."

The true meaning of "the rock" in this passage appears to be the truth of our Lord's Messiahship and divinity, which Peter had just confessed. It is as though our Lord had said, "You are rightly called by the name Peter, or stone, for you have confessed that mighty truth, on which, as on a rock, I will build my church."

But what are we to understand, when we read the promise which our Lord makes to Peter, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven?" Do these words mean that the right of admitting souls to heaven was to be placed in Peter's hands? The idea is preposterous. Such an office is the special prerogative of Christ Himself. (Rev. 1:18.) Do the words mean that Peter was to have any primacy or superiority over the rest of the apostles? There is not the slightest proof that such a meaning was attached to the words in the New Testament times, or that Peter had any rank or dignity above the rest of the twelve.

The true meaning of the promise to Peter appears to be, that he was to have the special privilege of first opening the door of salvation, both to the Jews and Gentiles. This was fulfilled to the letter, when he preached on the day of Pentecost to the Jews, and visited the Gentile Cornelius at his own house. On each occasion he used "the keys," and threw open the door of faith. And of this he seems to have been sensible himself--"God," he says, "made choice among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe." (Acts 15:7.)

Finally, what are we to understand, when we read the words, "Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven?" Does this mean that the apostle Peter was to have any power of forgiving sins, and absolving sinners? Such an idea is derogatory to Christ's special office, as our Great High Priest. It is a power which we never find Peter, or any of the apostles, once exercising. They always refer men to Christ.

The true meaning of this promise appears to be, that Peter and his brethren, the apostles, were to be specially commissioned to teach with authority the way of salvation. As the Old Testament priest declared authoritatively whose leprosy was cleansed, so the apostles were appointed to "declare and pronounce" authoritatively, whose sins were forgiven. Beside this, they were to be specially inspired to lay down rules and regulations for the guidance of the Church on disputed questions. Some things they were to "bind" or forbid--others they were to "loose" or allow. The decision of the council at Jerusalem, that the Gentiles need not be circumcised, was one example of the exercise of this power (Acts 15:19.) But it was a commission specially confined to the apostles. In discharging it they had no successors. With them it began, and with them it expired.

We will leave these controverted words here. Enough perhaps has been said upon them for our personal edification. Let us only remember that, in whatever sense men take them, they have nothing to do with the Church of Rome. Let us now turn our attention to points which more immediately concern our own souls.

In the first place, let us admire the noble confession which the apostle Peter makes in this passage. He says, in reply to our Lord's question, "Who do you say that I am?"--"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

At first sight a careless reader may see nothing very remarkable in these words of the apostle. He may think it extraordinary that they should call forth such strong commendation from our Lord. But such thoughts arise from ignorance and inconsideration. Men forget that it is a widely different thing to believe in Christ's divine mission, when we dwell in the midst of professing Christians, and to believe in it when we dwell in the midst of hardened and unbelieving Jews. The glory of Peter's confession lies in this, that he made it when few were with Christ and many against Him. He made it when the rulers of his own nation, the Scribes, and Priests, and Pharisees, were all opposed to his Master. He made it when our Lord was in the "form of a servant," without wealth, without royal dignity, without any visible marks of a King. To make such a confession at such a time, required great faith and great decision of character. The confession itself, as Brentius says, "was an epitome of all Christianity, and a compendium of true doctrine about religion." Therefore it was that our Lord said, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah."

We shall do well to copy that hearty zeal and affection which Peter here displayed. We are perhaps too much disposed to underrate this holy man, because of his occasional instability, and his thrice-repeated denial of his Lord.

This is a great mistake. With all his faults, Peter was a true-hearted, fervent, single-minded servant of Christ. With all his imperfections, he has given us a pattern that many Christians would do wisely to follow. Zeal like his may have its ebbs and flows, and sometimes lack steadiness of purpose. Zeal like his may be ill-directed, and sometimes make sad mistakes. But zeal like his is not to be despised. It awakens the sleeping. It stirs the sluggish. It provokes others to exertion. Anything is better than sluggishness, lukewarmness, and torpor, in the Church of Christ. Happy would it have been for Christendom had there been more Christians like Peter and Martin Luther, and fewer like Erasmus.

In the next place, let us take care that we understand what our Lord means when He speaks of His Church.

The Church which Jesus promises to build upon a rock, is the "blessed company of all believing people." It is not the visible church of any one nation, or country, or place. It is the whole body of believers of every age, and tongue, and people. It is a church composed of all who are washed in Christ's blood, clothed in Christ's righteousness, renewed by Christ's Spirit, joined to Christ by faith, and epistles of Christ in life. It is a church of which every member is baptized with the Holy Spirit, and is really and truly holy. It is a church which is one body. All who belong to it are of one heart and one mind, hold the same truths, and believe the same doctrines as necessary to salvation. It is a church which has only one Head. That head is Jesus Christ Himself. "He is the head of the body." (Col. 1:18.)

Let us beware of mistakes on this subject. Few words are so much misunderstood as the word "Church." Few mistakes have so much injured the cause of pure religion. Ignorance on this point has been a fertile source of bigotry, sectarianism, and persecution. Men have wrangled and contended about Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Independent Churches, as if it were needful to salvation to belong to some particular party, and as if, belonging to that party, we must of course belong to Christ. And all this time they have lost sight of the one true Church, outside of which there is no salvation at all. It will matter nothing at the last day where we have worshiped, if we are not found members of the true Church of God's elect.

In the last place, let us mark the glorious promises which our Lord makes to His Church. He says, "all the powers of hell will not conquer it."

The meaning of this promise is, that the power of Satan shall never destroy the people of Christ. He that brought sin and death into the first creation, by tempting Eve, shall never bring ruin on the new creation, by overthrowing

believers. The mystical body of Christ shall never perish or decay. Though often persecuted, afflicted, distressed, and brought low, it shall never come to an end. It shall outlive the wrath of Pharaohs and Roman Emperors. Visible churches, like Ephesus, may come to nothing. But the true Church never dies. Like the bush that Moses saw, it may burn, but shall not be consumed. Every member of it shall be brought safe to glory, In spite of falls, failures, and short-comings--in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil--no member of the true Church shall ever be cast away. (John 10:28.)

Verses 20-28. Christ foretells His death, resurrection and return

MATTHEW 16:21-23

From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.

Peter took him aside, and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This will never be done to you."

But he turned, and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men."

In the beginning of these verses we find our Lord revealing to His disciples a great and startling truth. That truth was His approaching death upon the cross. For the first time He places before their minds the astounding announcement, that "He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer--and be killed." He had not come on earth to take a kingdom, but to die. He had not come to reign, and be served, but to shed His blood as a sacrifice, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

It is almost impossible for us to conceive how strange and incomprehensible these tidings must have seemed to His disciples. Like most of the Jews, they could form no idea of a suffering Messiah. They did not understand that the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah must be literally fulfilled. They did not see that the sacrifices of the law were all meant to point them to the death of the true Lamb of God. They thought of nothing but the second glorious coming of Messiah, which is yet to take place at the end of the world. They thought so much of Messiah's crown, that they lost sight of His cross. We shall do well to remember this. A right understanding of this matter throws strong light on the lessons which this passage contains.

We learn, in the first place, from these verses, that there may be much spiritual ignorance even in a true disciple of Christ.

We cannot have a clearer proof of this, than the conduct of the apostle Peter in this passage. He tries to dissuade our Lord from suffering on the cross. "Far be it from you, Lord," he says, "this will not be done to you." He did not see the full purpose of our Lord's coming into the world. His eyes were blinded to the necessity of our Lord's death. He actually did what he could, to prevent that death taking place at all! And yet we know that Peter was a converted man. He really believed that Jesus was the Messiah. His heart was right in the sight of God.

These things are meant to teach us that we must neither regard saved men as infallible, because they are saved men, nor yet suppose they have no grace, because their grace is weak and small. One brother may possess singular gifts, and be a bright and shining light in the Church of Christ. But let us not forget that he is a man, and as a man liable to commit great mistakes. Another brother's knowledge may be scanty. He may fail to judge rightly on many points of doctrine. He may err both in word and deed. But has he faith and love towards Christ? Does he hold the Head? If so, let us deal patiently with him. What he sees not now, he may see hereafter. Like Peter, he may now be in the dark, and yet, like Peter, enjoy one day the full light of the Gospel.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, that there is no doctrine of Scripture so deeply important as the doctrine of Christ's atoning death.

We cannot have clearer proof of this, than the language used by our Lord in rebuking Peter. He addresses him by the dreadful name of "Satan," as if he was an adversary, and doing the devil's work, in trying to prevent His death. He says to him, whom he had so lately called "blessed," "Get behind me, Satan! You are an offence unto me." He tells the man whose noble confession he had just commended so highly, "for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men." Stronger words than these never fell from our Lord's lips. The error that drew from so loving a Savior such a stern rebuke to such a true disciple, must have been a mighty error indeed.

The truth is, that our Lord would have us regard the crucifixion as the central truth of Christianity. Right views of His vicarious death, and the benefits resulting from it, lie at the very foundation of Bible-religion. Never let us forget this. On matters of church government, and the form of worship, men may differ from us, and yet reach heaven in safety. On the matter of Christ's atoning death, as the way of peace, truth is only one. If we are wrong here, we are ruined

forever. Error on many other points is only a skin disease. Error about Christ's death is a disease at the heart. Here let us take our stand. Let nothing move us from this ground. The sum of all our hopes must be, that "Christ has died for us." (1 Thess. 5:10.) Give up that doctrine, and we have no solid hope at all.

MATTHEW 16:24-28

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds. Most certainly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste of death, until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom."

In order to see the connection of these verses, we must remember the mistaken impressions of our Lord's disciples as to the purpose of His coming into the world. Like Peter, they could not bear the idea of the crucifixion. They thought that Jesus had come to set up an earthly kingdom. They did not see that He must suffer and die. They dreamed of worldly honors and temporal rewards in their Master's service. They did not understand that true Christians, like Christ, must be made perfect through sufferings. Our Lord corrects these misapprehensions in words of peculiar solemnity, which we shall do well to lay up in our hearts.

Let us learn, in the first place, from these verses, that men must make up their minds to trouble and self-denial, if they follow Christ.

Our Lord dispels the fond dreams of His disciples, by telling those who His followers must "take up the cross." The glorious kingdom they were expecting, was not about to be set up immediately. They must make up their minds to persecution and affliction, if they intended to be His servants. They must be content to "lose their lives," if they would have their souls saved.

It is good for us all to see this point clearly. We must not conceal from ourselves that true Christianity brings with it a daily cross in this life, while it offers us a crown of glory in the life to come. The flesh must be daily crucified. The devil must be daily resisted. The world must be daily overcome. There is a warfare to be waged, and a battle to be fought. All this is the inseparable accompaniment of true religion. Heaven is not to be won without it. Never was

there a truer word than the old saying, "No cross, no crown!" If we never found this out by experience, our souls are in a poor condition.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, that there is nothing so precious as a man's soul.

Our Lord teaches this lesson by asking one of the most solemn questions that the New Testament contains. It is a question so well known, and so often repeated, that people often lose sight of its searching character. But it is a question that ought to sound in our ears like a trumpet, whenever we are tempted to neglect our eternal interests--"What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?"

There can only be one answer to this question. There is nothing on earth, or under the earth, that can make amends to us for the loss of our souls. There is nothing that money can buy, or man can give, to be named in comparison with our souls. The world and all that it contains is temporal. It is all fading, perishing, and passing away. The soul is eternal. That one single word is the key to the whole question. Let it sink down deeply into our hearts. Are we wavering in our religion? Do we fear the cross? Does the way seem too narrow? Let our Master's words ring in our ears, "What will it profit a man?" and let us doubt no more.

Let us learn, in the last place, that the second coming of Christ is the time when His people shall receive their rewards. "The Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds."

There is deep wisdom in this saying of our Lord's, when viewed in connection with the preceding verses. He knows the heart of a man. He knows how soon we are ready to be cast down, and like Israel of old to be "discouraged by the difficulties of the way." He therefore holds out to us a gracious promise. He reminds us that He has yet to come a second time, as surely as He came the first time. He tells us that this is the time when His disciples shall receive their good things. There will be glory, honour, and reward in abundance one day for all who have served and loved Jesus. But it is to be in the dispensation of the second advent, and not of the first. The bitter must come before the sweet, the cross before the crown. The first advent is the dispensation of the crucifixion. The Second Advent is the dispensation of the kingdom. We must submit to take part with our Lord in His humiliation, if we mean ever to share in his glory.

And now let us not leave these verses without serious self-inquiry as to the matters which they contain. We have heard of the necessity of taking up the cross, and denying ourselves. Have we taken it up, and are we carrying it daily? We have heard of the value of the soul. Do we live as if we believed it? We have heard of Christ's second advent. Do we look forward to it with hope and joy? Happy is that man who can give a satisfactory answer to these questions.

Chapter 17

17. The rejected King and His coming glory

Verses 1-21. The transfiguration

MATTHEW 17:1-13

After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them up into a high mountain by themselves. He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as the light. Behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with him.

Peter answered, and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, let's make three tents here--one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them. Behold, a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."

When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces, and were very afraid. Jesus came and touched them and said, "Get up, and don't be afraid." Lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Don't tell anyone what you saw, until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

His disciples asked him, saying, "Then why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

Jesus answered them, "Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things, but I tell you that Elijah has come already, and they didn't recognize him, but did to him whatever they wanted to. Even so the Son of Man will also suffer by them." Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptizer.

These verses contain one of the most remarkable events in our Lord's earthly ministry--the event commonly called the TRANSFIGURATION. The order in which it is recorded is beautiful and instructive. The latter part of the last chapter shows us the cross. Here we are graciously allowed to see something of the coming reward. The hearts which have just been saddened by a plain statement of Christ's sufferings, are at once gladdened by a vision of Christ's glory. Let us mark this. We often lose much by not tracing the connection between chapter and chapter in the word of God.

There are some mysterious things, no doubt, in the vision here described. It must needs be so. We are yet in the body. Our senses are conversant with physical and material things. Our ideas and perceptions about glorified bodies and dead saints, must necessarily be vague and imperfect. Let us content ourselves with endeavouring to mark out the PRACTICAL LESSONS which the transfiguration is meant to teach us.

In the first place, we have in these verses a striking pattern of the glory in which Christ and His people will appear when He comes the second time.

There can be little question that this was one main object of this wonderful vision. It was meant to encourage the disciples, by giving them a glimpse of good things yet to come. That "face shining as the sun," and that "clothing white as the light," were intended to give the disciples some idea of the majesty in which Jesus will appear to the world, when He comes the second time, and all His saints with Him. The corner of the veil was lifted up, to show them their Master's true dignity. They were taught that, if He did not yet appear to the world in the semblance of a king, it was only because the time for putting on His royal apparel was not yet come. It is impossible to draw any other conclusion from Peter's language, when writing on the subject. He says, with distinct reference to the transfiguration, "We were eye-witnesses of his majesty." (2 Peter 1:16.)

It is good for us to have the coming glory of Christ and His people deeply impressed on our minds. We are sadly apt to forget it. There are few visible indications of it in the world. We see not yet all things put under our Lord's feet. Sin, unbelief, and superstition abound. Thousands are practically saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." It does not yet appear what His people shall be. Their crosses, their tribulations, their weaknesses, their conflicts, are all manifest enough. But there are few signs of their future reward. Let us beware of giving way to doubts in this matter. Let us silence such doubts by reading over the history of the transfiguration. There is laid up for Jesus, and all that believe on Him, such glory as the heart of man never conceived. It is not only promised,

but part of it has actually been seen by three competent witnesses. One of them says, "we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." (John 1:14.) Surely that which has been seen may well be believed.

In the second place, we have in these verses, an unanswerable proof of the resurrection of the body, and the life after death. We are told that Moses and Elijah appeared visibly in glory with Christ. They were seen in a bodily form. They were heard talking with our Lord. Fourteen hundred and eighty years had rolled round, since Moses died and was buried. More than nine hundred years had passed away, since Elijah "went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Yet here they are seen alive by Peter, James, and John. Let us lay firm hold on this part of the vision. It deserves close attention. We must all feel, if we ever think at all, that the state of the dead is an amazing and mysterious subject. One after another we bury them out of our sight. We lay them in their narrow beds, and see them no more, and their bodies become dust. But will they really live again? Shall we really see them again? Will the grave really give back the dead at the last day? These are questions that will occasionally come across the minds of some, in spite of all the plainest statements in the word of God.

Now we have in the transfiguration the clearest evidence that the dead will rise again. We find two men appearing on earth, in their bodies, who had long been separate from the land of the living--and in them, we have a pledge of the resurrection of all. All that have ever lived upon earth will again be called to life, and render up their account. Not one will be found missing. There is no such thing as annihilation. All that have ever fallen asleep in Christ will be found in safe keeping; patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs--down to the humblest servant of God in our own day. Though unseen to us, they all live to God. "He is not a God of the dead, but of the living." (Luke 20:38.) Their spirits live as surely as we live ourselves, and will appear hereafter in glorified bodies, as surely as Moses and Elijah in the mount. These are indeed solemn thoughts! There is a resurrection, and men like Felix may well tremble. There is a resurrection, and men like Paul may well rejoice.

In the last place, we have in these verses a remarkable testimony to Christ's infinite superiority over all mankind.

This is a point which is brought out strongly by the voice from heaven, which the disciples heard. Peter, bewildered by the heavenly vision, and not knowing what to say, proposed to build three tabernacles, one for Christ, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He seemed in fact to place the law-giver and the prophet side by side with his divine Master, as if all three were equal. At once, we are told, the proposal was rebuked in a marked manner. A cloud covered

Moses and Elijah, and they were no more seen. A voice at the same time came forth from the cloud, repeating the solemn words, made use of at our Lord's baptism, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased--listen to HIM."

That voice was meant to teach Peter, that there was one there far greater than Moses or Elijah. Moses was a faithful servant of God. Elijah was a bold witness for the truth. But Christ was far above either one or the other. He was the Saviour to whom law and prophets were continually pointing. He was the true Prophet, whom all were commanded to hear. (Deut. 18:15.) Moses and Elijah were great men in their day. But Peter and his companions were to remember, that in nature, dignity, and office, they were far below Christ. He was the true sun--they were the planets depending daily on His light. He was the root--they were the branches. He was the Master--they were the servants. Their goodness was all derived--His was original and His own. Let them honour Moses and the prophets, as holy men. But if they would be saved, they must take Christ alone for their Master, and glory only in Him. "Listen to Him."

Let us see in these words a striking lesson to the whole Church of Christ. There is a constant tendency in human nature to "hear man." Bishops, priests, deacons, popes, cardinals, councils, presbyterian preachers, and independent ministers, are continually exalted to a place which God never intended them to fill, and made practically to usurp the honour of Christ. Against this tendency let us all watch, and be on our guard. Let these solemn words of the vision ever ring in our ears, "Listen to Christ."

The best of men are only men at their very best. Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles--martyrs, church fathers, reformers, puritans--all, all are sinners, who need a Saviour. They may be holy, useful, honourable in their place--but sinners after all. They must never be allowed to stand between us and Christ. He alone is "the Son, in whom the Father is well pleased." He alone is sealed and appointed to give the bread of life. He alone has the keys in His hands, "God over all, blessed for ever." Let us take heed that we hear His voice, and follow Him. Let us value all religious teaching just in proportion as it leads us to Jesus. The sum and substance of saving religion is to "listen to Christ."

MATTHEW 17:14-21

When they came to the multitude, a man came to him, kneeling down to him, saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is epileptic, and suffers grievously; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. So I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him."

Jesus answered, "O Faithless and perverse generation! How long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you? Bring him here to me." Jesus rebuked the demon, and it went out of him, and the boy was cured from that hour.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately, and said, "Why weren't we able to cast it out?"

He said to them, "Because you have so little faith. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. But this kind doesn't go out except by prayer and fasting."

We read in this passage another of our Lord's great miracles. He heals a young man lunatic and possessed with a devil.

The first thing we see in these verses is a lively emblem of the dreadful influence sometimes exercised by Satan over the young. We are told of a certain man's son, who was an "epileptic, and suffered grievously." We are told of the evil spirit pressing him on to the destruction of body and soul. "He often falls into the fire, and often into the water." It was one of those cases of Satanic possession, which, however common in our Lord's times, in our own day is rarely seen. But we can easily imagine that, when they did occur, they must have been peculiarly distressing to the family of the afflicted. It is painful enough to see the bodies of those we love racked by disease. How much more painful must it have been to see body and mind completely under the influence of the devil. "Out of hell," says Bishop Hall, "there could not be greater misery."

But we must not forget that there are many instances of Satan's spiritual dominion over young people, which are quite as painful, in their way, as the case described in this passage. There are thousands of young men who seem to have wholly given themselves up to Satan's temptations, and to be led captive at his will. They cast off all fear of God, and all respect for His commandments. They serve diverse lusts and pleasures. They run wildly into every excess of riot. They refuse to listen to the advice of parents, teachers, or ministers. They fling aside all regard for health, character, or worldly respectability. They do all that lies in their power to ruin themselves, body and soul, for time and eternity. They are willing bondslaves of Satan. Who has not seen such young men? They are to be seen in town and in country. They are to be found among rich and among poor. Surely such young men give mournful proof, that although Satan now-a-days seldom has possession of man's body, he still exercises a fearful dominion over some men's souls.

Yet even about such young men as these, be it remembered, we must never despair. We must call to mind the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Bad as this boy's case was, of whom we read in these verses, he was "cured from the very hour" that he was brought to Christ! Parents, and teachers, and ministers should go on praying for young men, even at their worst. Hard as their hearts seem now, they may yet be softened. Desperate as their wickedness now appears, they may yet be healed. They may yet repent, and be converted, like John Newton, and their last state prove better than their first. Who can tell? Let it be a settled principle with us, when we read our Lord's miracles, never to despair of the conversion of any soul.

In the second place, we see in these verses a striking example of the weakening effect of unbelief. The disciples anxiously inquired of our Lord, when they saw the devil yielding to his power, "Why weren't we able to cast it out?" They received an answer full of the deepest instruction--"because you have so little faith." Would they know the secret of their own sad failure in the hour of need? It was lack of faith.

Let us ponder this point well, and learn wisdom. Faith is the key to success in the Christian warfare. Unbelief is the sure road to defeat. Once let our faith languish and decay, and all our graces will languish with it. Courage, patience, long-suffering, and hope, will soon wither and dwindle away. Faith is the root on which they all depend. The same Israelites who at one time went through the Red Sea in triumph, at another time shrunk from danger, like cowards, when they reached the borders of the Promised Land. Their God was the same who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. Their leader was that same Moses who had wrought so many wonders before their eyes. But their faith was not the same. They gave way to shameful doubts of God's love and power. "They could not enter in because of unbelief." (Heb. 3:19.)

In the last place, we see in these verses that Satan's kingdom is not to be pulled down without diligence and pains. This seems to be the lesson of the verse which concludes the passage we are now considering--"This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting." A gentle rebuke to the disciples appears to be implied in the words. Perhaps they had been too much lifted up by past successes. Perhaps they had been less careful in the use of means in their Master's absence, than they were under their Master's eye. At any rate they receive a plain hint from our Lord, that the warfare against Satan must never be lightly carried on. They are warned that no victories are to be won easily over the prince of this world. Without fervent prayer, and diligent self-mortification, they would often meet with failure and defeat.

The lesson here laid down is one of deep importance. "I would," says Bullinger, "that this part of the Gospel pleased us as much as those parts which concede liberty." We are all apt to contract a habit of doing religious acts in a thoughtless, perfunctory way. Like Israel, puffed up with the fall of Jericho, we are ready to say to ourselves, "The men of Ai are but few;" (Josh. 7:3;) "there is no need to put forth all our strength." Like Israel, we often learn by bitter experience, that spiritual battles are not to be won without hard fighting. The ark of the Lord must never be handled irreverently. God's work must never be carelessly done.

May we all bear in mind our Lord's words to His disciples, and make a practical use of them. In the pulpit, and on the platform--in the Sunday school, and in the district--in our use of family prayers, and in reading our own Bibles--let us diligently watch our own spirit. Whatever we do, let us "do it with our might." (Eccles. 9:10) It is a fatal mistake to underrate our foes. Greater is He that is for us than he that is against us--but, for all that, he that is against us is not to be despised. He is the prince of this world. He is a strong man armed, keeping his house, who will not "go out," and part with his goods without a struggle. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. We have need to take the whole armor of God, and not only to take it, but to use it too. We may be very sure that those who win most victories over the world, the flesh, and the devil, are those who pray most in private, and "discipline their bodies, and bring them into subjection." (1 Cor. 9:27.)

Verses 22-23. Jesus' repetition of His approaching death

Verses 27-27. The tribute money

MATTHEW 17:22-27

While they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up."

They were exceedingly sorrowful. When they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two drachma tax came to Peter, and said, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" He said, "Yes."

When he came into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive toll or tribute? From their children, or from strangers?"

Peter said to him, "From strangers."

Jesus said to him, "Therefore the children are exempt. But, lest we cause them to stumble, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the first fish that comes up. When you have opened its mouth, you will find a four drachma coin. Take that, and give it to them for me and you."

These verses contain a circumstance in our Lord's history, which is not recorded by any of the evangelists excepting Matthew. A remarkable miracle is worked in order to provide payment of the tax-money, required for the service of the temple. There are three striking points in the narrative, which deserve attentive observation.

Let us observe, in the first place, our Lord's perfect knowledge of everything that is said and done in this world. We are told that those who "collected the two drachma tax came to Peter, and said, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" He said, 'Yes.'" It was evident that our Lord was not present, when the question was asked and the answer given. And yet no sooner did Peter come into the house than our Lord asked him, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive toll or tribute?" He showed that He was as well acquainted with the conversation, as if He had been listening or standing by.

There is something unspeakably solemn in the thought that the Lord Jesus knows all things. There is an eye that sees all our daily conduct. There is an ear that hears all our daily words. All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him, with whom we have to do. Concealment is impossible. Hypocrisy is useless. We may deceive ministers. We may fool our family and neighbors. But the Lord sees us through and through. We cannot deceive Christ.

We ought to endeavour to make practical use of this truth. We should strive to live as in the Lord's sight, and, like Abraham, to "walk before him." (Gen. 17:1.) Let it be our daily aim to say nothing we would not like Christ to hear, and to do nothing we would not like Christ to see. Let us measure every difficult question as to right and wrong by one simple test, "How would I behave, if Jesus was standing by my side?" Such a standard is not extravagant and absurd. It is a standard that interferes with no duty or relation of life. It interferes with nothing but sin. Happy is he that tries to realize his Lord's presence, and to do all and say all as unto Christ.

Let us observe, in the next place, our Lord's almighty power over all creation. He makes a fish his paymaster. He makes a voiceless creature bring the tribute-money to meet the collector's demand. Well says Jerome, "I know not which to admire most here, our Lord's foreknowledge, or His greatness."

We see here a literal fulfilment of the Psalmist's words, "You make him ruler over the works of your hands; You have put all things under his feet--all sheep and oxen, yes, and the animals of the field, the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, and whatever passes through the paths of the seas." (Psalm 8:6-8.)

Here is one among many proofs of the majesty and greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ. He only who first created, could at His will command the obedience of all His creatures. "By him were all things created. By Him all things are held together." (Col. 1:16-18.) The believer who goes forth to do Christ's work among the heathen, may safely commit himself to his Master's keeping. He serves one who has all power, even over the beasts of the earth. How wonderful the thought, that such an Almighty Lord should condescend to be crucified for our salvation! How comfortable the thought that when He comes again the second time, He will gloriously manifest His power over all created things to the whole world--"The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock--and dust shall be the serpent's food." (Isaiah 65:25.)

In the last place, let us observe, in these verses, our Lord's willingness to make concessions, rather than give offence. He might justly have claimed exemption from the payment of this tax-money. He, who was Son of God, might fairly have been excused from paying for the maintenance of His Father's house. He, who was "greater than the temple," might have shown good cause for declining to contribute to the support of the temple. But our Lord does not do so. He claims no exemption. He desires Peter to pay the money demanded. At the same time He declares His reasons. It was to be done, "so that we may not offend them." "A miracle is worked," says Bishop Hall, "rather than offend even a tax-collector."

Our Lord's example in this case deserves attention of all who profess and call themselves Christians. There is deep wisdom in those seven words, "so that we may not offend them." They teach us plainly, that there are matters in which Christ's people ought to forego their own opinions, and submit to requirements which they may not thoroughly approve, rather than give offence and "hinder the Gospel of Christ." God's rights undoubtedly we ought never to give up; but we may sometimes safely give up our own. It may sound very fine and seem very heroic to be always standing out tenaciously for our rights. But it may well be doubted, with such a passage as this, whether such tenacity is always wise, and shows the mind of Christ. There are occasions, when it shows more grace in a Christian to submit than to resist.

Let us remember this passage as CITIZENS. We may not like all the political measures of our rulers. We may disapprove of some of the taxes they impose. But the grand question after all is--Will it do any good to the cause of religion to resist the powers that be? Are their measures really injuring our souls? If not, let us hold our peace, "so that we may not offend them." "A Christian," says Bullinger, "never ought to disturb the public peace for things of mere temporary importance."

Let us remember this passage as members of a CHURCH. We may not like every jot and tittle of the forms and ceremonies used in our communion. We may not think that those who rule us in spiritual matters are always wise. But after all--Are the points on which we are dissatisfied really of vital importance? Is any great truth of the Gospel at stake? If not, let us be quiet, "so that we may not offend them."

Let us remember this passage as members of SOCIETY. There may be usages and customs in the circle where our lot is cast, which to us, as Christians, are tiresome, useless, and unprofitable. But are they matters of principle? Do they injure our souls? Will it do any good to the cause of religion, if we refuse to comply with them? If not, let us patiently submit, "lest we cause them to stumble."

Well would it be for the church and the world, if these seven words of our Lord had been more studied, pondered, and used! Who can tell the damage that has been done to the cause of the Gospel, by morbid scrupulosity, and conscientiousness--falsely so called! May we all remember the example of the great apostle of the Gentiles--"we suffer all things, lest we should hinder the Gospel of Christ." (1 Cor. 9:12.)

Chapter 18

18. Instructions of the rejected King - forgiveness

Verses 1-14. Character of citizens of the kingdom

MATTHEW 18:1-14

In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Jesus called a little child to himself, and set him in the midst of them, and said, "Most certainly I tell you, unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever therefore

humbles himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever receives one such little child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him that a huge millstone should be hung around his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depths of the sea.

"Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must be that the occasions come, but woe to that person through whom the occasion comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the Gehenna of fire. See that you don't despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man came to save that which was lost.

"What do you think? If a man has one hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine, go to the mountains, and seek that which has gone astray? If he finds it, most certainly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

The first thing that we are taught in these verses, is the necessity of conversion, and of conversion manifested by childlike humility. The disciples came to our Lord with the question, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" They spoke as men half-enlightened, and full of carnal expectations. They received an answer well calculated to awaken them from their day-dream--an answer containing a truth which lies at the very foundation of Christianity--"unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

Let these words sink down deeply into our hearts. Without conversion there is no salvation. We all need an entire change of nature. Of ourselves we have neither faith, nor fear, nor love towards God. "We must be born again." Of ourselves we are utterly unfit for dwelling in God's presence. Heaven would be no heaven to us if we were not converted. It is true of all ranks, classes, and orders of mankind. All are born in sin and children of wrath, and all, without exception, need to be born again and made new creatures. A new heart must be given to us, and a new spirit put within us. Old things must pass away, and all things must become new. It is a good thing to be baptized into the Christian Church, and use Christian means of grace. But after all, "are we converted?"

Would we know whether we are really converted? Would we know the test by which we must try ourselves? The surest mark of true conversion is humility. If we have really received the Holy Spirit, we shall show it by a meek and childlike spirit. Like children, we shall think humbly of our own strength and wisdom, and be very dependent on our Father in heaven. Like children, we shall not seek great things in this world; and having food and clothing and a Father's love, we shall be content. Truly this is a heart-searching test! It exposes the unsoundness of many a so-called conversion. It is easy to be a convert from one party to another party, from one sect to another sect, from one set of opinions to another set of opinions. Such conversions save no one's soul. What we all want is a conversion from pride to humility--from high thoughts of ourselves to lowly thoughts of ourselves--from self-conceit to self-abasement--from the mind of the Pharisee to the mind of the Tax-collector. A conversion of this kind we must experience, if we hope to be saved. These are the conversions that are wrought by the Holy Spirit.

The next thing that we are taught in these verses, is the great sin of putting stumbling blocks in the way of believers. The words of the Lord Jesus on this subject are peculiarly solemn. "Woe unto the world because of offences!--Woe to that man by whom the offence comes."

We put offences or stumbling blocks in the way of men's souls, whenever we do anything to keep them back from Christ--or to turn them out of the way of salvation--or to disgust them with true religion. We may do it directly by persecuting, ridiculing, opposing, or dissuading them from decided service of Christ. We may do it indirectly by living a life inconsistent with our religious profession, and by making Christianity loathsome and distasteful by our own conduct. Whenever we do anything of the kind, it is clear, from our Lord's words, that we commit a great sin.

There is something very fearful in the doctrine here laid down. It ought to stir up within us great searchings of heart. It is not enough that we wish to do good in this world. Are we quite sure that we are not doing harm? We may not openly persecute Christ's servants. But are there none that we are injuring by our ways and our example? It is dreadful to think of the amount of harm that can be done by one inconsistent professor of religion. He gives a handle to the infidel. He supplies the worldly man with an excuse for remaining undecided. He checks the inquirer after salvation. He discourages the saints. He is, in short, a living sermon on behalf of the devil. The last day alone will reveal the wholesale ruin of souls, that "offences" have occasioned in the Church of Christ. One of Nathan's charges against David was, "you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." (2 Sam. 12:14.)

The next thing that we are taught in these verses is, the reality of future punishment after death. Two strong expressions are used by our Lord on this point. He speaks of being "cast into everlasting fire." He speaks of being "cast into hell fire."

The meaning of these words is clear and unmistakable. There is a place of unspeakable misery in the world to come, to which all who die impenitent and unbelieving, must ultimately be consigned. There is revealed in Scripture a "fiery indignation," which sooner or later will devour all God's adversaries. (Heb. 10:27.) The same sure word which holds out a heaven to all who repent and are converted, declares plainly that there will be a hell for all the ungodly.

Let no man deceive us with vain words upon this dreadful subject. Men have arisen in these latter days, who profess to deny the eternity of future punishment, and repeat the devil's old argument, that we "shall not surely die." (Gen. 3:4.) Let none of their reasonings move us, however plausible they may sound. Let us stand fast in the old paths. The God of love and mercy, is also a God of justice. He will surely requite. The flood in Noah's day, and the burning of Sodom, were meant to show us what He will one day do. No lips have ever spoken so clearly about hell as those of Christ Himself. Hardened sinners will find out, to their cost, that there is such a thing as the "wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. 6:17.)

The last thing we are taught in these verses, is the value that God sets on the least and lowest of believers. "It is not the will of your Father in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

These words are meant for the encouragement of all true Christians, and not for little children only. The connection in which they are found with the parable of the hundred sheep and one that went astray, seems to place this beyond doubt. They are meant to show us that our Lord Jesus is a Shepherd, who cares tenderly for every soul committed to His charge. The youngest, the weakest, the sickliest of His flock is as dear to Him as the strongest. They shall never perish. None shall ever pluck them out of His hand. He will lead them gently through the wilderness of this world. He will not overdrive them a single day, lest any die. (Gen. 33:13.) He will carry them through every difficulty. He will defend them against every enemy. The saying which He spoke shall be literally fulfilled--"Of those whom you have given me I have lost none." (John 18:9.) With such a Saviour, who need fear beginning to be a thorough Christian? With such a Shepherd, who, having once begun, need fear being cast away?

Verses 15-20. Discipline and prayer in the kingdom

MATTHEW 18:15-20

"If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother. But if he doesn't listen, take one or two more with you, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector. Most certainly I tell you, whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever things you release on earth will have been released in heaven. Again, assuredly I tell you, that if two of you will agree on earth concerning anything that they will ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them."

These words of the Lord Jesus contain an expression which has been often misapplied. The command to "hear the church," has been so interpreted as to contradict other passages of God's word. It has been falsely applied to the authority of the whole visible church in matters of doctrine, and so been made an excuse for the exercise of much ecclesiastical tyranny. But the abuse of Scripture truths must not tempt us to neglect the use of them. We must not turn away altogether from any text, because some have perverted it, and made it poison.

Let us notice in the first place, how admirable are the rules laid down by our Lord, for the healing of differences among brethren.

If we have unhappily received any injury from a fellow-member of Christ's Church, the first step to be taken is to visit him "alone," and tell him his fault. He may have injured us unintentionally, as Abimelech did Abraham. (Gen. 21:26.) His conduct may admit of explanation, like that of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, when they built an altar, as they returned to their own land. (Joshua 22:24.) At any rate, this friendly, faithful, straight-forward way of dealing is the most likely course to win a brother, if he is to be won. "A soft tongue breaks the bone." (Prov. 25:15.) Who can tell but he may say at once, "I was wrong"--and make ample reparation?

If however this course of proceeding fails to produce any good effect, a second step is to be taken. We are to "take with us one or two" companions, and tell our brother of his fault in their presence and hearing. Who can tell but his conscience may be stricken, when he finds his misconduct made known, and he

may be ashamed and repent? If not, we shall at all events have the testimony of witnesses, that we did all we could to bring our brother to a right mind, and that he deliberately refused, when appealed to, to make amends.

Finally, if this second course of proceeding prove useless, we are to refer the whole matter to the Christian congregation of which we are members--we are to "tell it to the church." Who can tell but the heart which has been unmoved by private remonstrances, may be moved by the fear of public exposure? If not, there remains but one view to take of our brother's case--we must sorrowfully regard him as one who has shaken off all Christian principles, and will be guided by no higher motives than "a Gentile or a tax collector."

The passage is a beautiful instance of the mingled wisdom and tender consideration of our Lord's teaching. What a knowledge it shows of human nature! Nothing does so much harm to the cause of religion as the quarrels of Christians. No stone should be left unturned, no trouble spared, in order to prevent their being dragged before the public. What a delicate thoughtfulness it shows for the sensitiveness of poor human nature! Many a scandalous breach would be prevented, if we were more ready to practice the rule of "between you and him alone." Happy would it be for the Church and the world, if this portion of our Lord's teaching was more carefully studied and obeyed. Differences and divisions there will be, so long as the world stands. But how many of them would be extinguished at once, if the course recommended in these verses was tried.

In the second place, let us observe what a clear argument we have in these verses for the exercise of DISCIPLINE in a Christian congregation.

Our Lord commands disagreements between Christians, which cannot be otherwise settled, to be referred to the decision of the Christian assembly to which they belong. "Tell it," he says, "to the church." It is evident from this, that he intends every congregation of professing Christians to take cognizance of the moral conduct of its members, either by the action of the whole body collectively, or of heads and elders to whom its authority may be delegated. It is evident also that He intends every congregation to have the power of excluding disobedient and refractory members from participation in its ordinances. "If he refuses," he says, "to hear the church also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector." He says not a word about temporal punishment, and civil disabilities. Spiritual penalties are the only penalty He permits the Church to inflict, and when rightly inflicted, they are not to be lightly regarded. "Whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven." Such appears to be the substance of our Lord's teaching about ecclesiastical discipline.

It is vain to deny that the whole subject is surrounded with difficulties. On no point has the influence of the world weighed so heavily on the action of Churches. On no point have Churches made so many mistakes--sometimes on the side of sleepy remissness, sometimes on the side of blind severity. No doubt the power of excommunication has been fearfully abused and perverted, and, as Quesnel says, "we ought to be more afraid of our sins than of all the excommunications in the world." Still it is impossible to deny, with such a passage as this before us, that church discipline is according to the mind of Christ, and when wisely exercised, is calculated to promote a church's health and well-being. It can never be right that all sorts of people, however wicked and ungodly, should be allowed to come to the table of the Lord, with no one either permitting or forbidding. It is the bounden duty of every Christian to use his influence to prevent such a state of things. A perfect communion can never be attained in this world, but purity should be the mark at which we aim. An increasingly high standard of qualification for full church-membership, will always be found one of the best evidences of a prosperous church.

Let us observe, in the last place, what gracious encouragement Christ holds out to those who meet together in His name. He says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." That saying is a striking proof of our Lord's divinity. God alone can be in more places than one at the same time.

There is comfort in these words for all who love to meet together for religious purposes. At every assembly for public worship, at every gathering for prayer and praise--at every missionary meeting--at every Bible reading, the King of kings is present--Christ Himself attends! We may be often disheartened by the small number who are present on such occasions, compared to those who meet for worldly ends. We may sometimes find it hard to bear the taunts and ridicule of an ill-natured world, which cries like the enemy of old, "What are these feeble people doing?" (Nehem. 4:2.) But we have no reason for despondency. We may boldly fall back on these words of Jesus. At all such meetings we have the company of Christ Himself.

There is a solemn rebuke in these words for all who neglect the public worship of God, and never attend meetings for any religious purpose. They turn their backs on the society of the Lord of lords. They miss the opportunity of meeting Christ Himself. It avails nothing to say that the proceedings of religious meetings are marked by weakness and infirmity, or that as much good is gotten by staying at home as going to church. The words of our Lord should silence such arguments at once. Surely men are not wise when they speak contemptuously of any gathering where Christ is present.

May we all ponder these things. If we have met together with God's people for spiritual purposes in times past, let us persevere, and not be ashamed. If we have hitherto despised such meetings, let us consider our ways, and learn wisdom.

Verses 21-35. Forgiveness in the kingdom

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "I don't tell you until seven times, but, until seventy times seven. Therefore the Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who wanted to reconcile accounts with his servants. When he had begun to reconcile, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But because he couldn't pay, his master commanded him to be sold, with his wife, his children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down and kneeled before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will repay you all!' The master of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

"But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him one hundred denarii, and he grabbed him, and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'

"So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you!' He would not, but went and cast him into prison, until he should pay back that which was due. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were exceedingly distressed, and came and told to their master all that was done. Then his master called him in, and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt, because you begged me. Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, even as I had mercy on you?' His master was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due to him. So my heavenly Father will also do to you, if you don't each forgive your brother from your hearts for his misdeeds."

In these verses the Lord Jesus deals with a deeply important subject--the FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES. We live in a wicked world, and it is vain to expect that we can escape ill-treatment, however carefully we may behave. To know how to conduct ourselves, when we are ill-treated, is of great importance to our souls.

In the first place, the Lord Jesus lays it down as a general rule, that we ought to forgive others to the uttermost. Peter put the question, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?" He received for answer, "I don't tell you until seven times, but, until seventy times seven."

The rule here laid down must of course be interpreted with sober-minded qualification. Our Lord does not mean that offences against the law of the land and the good order of society, are to be passed over in silence. He does not mean that we are to allow people to commit thefts, and assaults, with impunity. All that He means is, that we are to exercise a general spirit of mercy and forgivingness towards our brethren. We are to bear much, and to put up with much, rather than quarrel. We are to look over much, and submit to much, rather than have any strife. We are to lay aside everything like malice, strife, revenge, and retaliation. Such feelings are only fit for heathen. They are utterly unworthy of a disciple of Christ.

What a happy world it would be if this rule of our Lord's was more known and better obeyed! How many of the miseries of mankind are occasioned by disputes, quarrels, lawsuits, and an obstinate tenacity about what men call "their rights!" How many of them might be altogether avoided, if men were more willing to forgive, and more desirous for peace! Let us never forget that a fire cannot go on burning without fuel. Just in the same way it takes two to make a quarrel. Let us each resolve by God's grace, that of these two we will never be one. Let us resolve to return good for evil, and blessing for cursing, and so melt down enmity, and change our foes into friends. (Rom. 12:20.) It was a fine feature in Archbishop Cranmer's character, that if you did him an injury, he was sure to be your friend.

In the second place, our Lord supplies us with two powerful motives for exercising a forgiving spirit. He tells us a story of a man who owed an enormous sum to his master, and had "nothing to pay." Nevertheless at the time of reckoning his master had compassion on him, and "forgave him all." He tells us that this very man, after being forgiven himself, refused to forgive a fellow-servant a trifling debt. He actually cast him into prison, and would not abate a fragment of his demand. He tells us how punishment overtook this wicked and cruel man, who, after receiving mercy, ought surely to have shown mercy to others. And finally, he concludes the parable with the impressive words, "so my heavenly Father will also do to you, if you don't each forgive your brother from your hearts for his misdeeds."

It is clear from this parable that one motive for forgiving others, ought to be the recollection that we all need forgiveness at God's hands ourselves. Day after

day we are coming short in many things, "leaving undone what we ought to do, and doing what we ought not to do." Day after day we require mercy and pardon. Our neighbours' offences against us are mere trifles, compared with our offences against God. Surely it adversely suits poor erring creatures like us, to be extreme in marking what is done amiss by our brethren, or slow to forgive it.

Another motive for forgiving others, ought to be the recollection of the day of judgment, and the standard by which we shall all be tried in that day. There will be no forgiveness in that day for unforgiving people. Such people would be unfit for heaven. They would not be able to value a dwelling-place to which "mercy" is the only title, and in which "mercy" is the eternal subject of song. Surely if we intend to stand at the right hand, when Jesus sits on the throne of His glory, we must learn, while we are on earth, to forgive.

Let these truths sink down deeply into our hearts. It is a melancholy fact that there are few Christian duties so little practiced as that of forgiveness. It is sad to see how much bitterness, unmercifulness, spite, harshness, and unkindness there is among men. Yet there are few duties so strongly enforced in the New Testament Scriptures as this duty is, and few the neglect of which so clearly shuts a man out of the kingdom of God.

Would we give proof that we are at peace with God, washed in Christ's blood, born of the Spirit, and made God's children by adoption and grace? Let us remember this passage. Like our Father in heaven, let us be forgiving. Has any man injured us? Let us this day forgive him. As Leighton says "we ought to forgive ourselves little and others much."

Would we do good to the world? Would we have any influence on others, and make them see the beauty of true religion? Let us remember this passage. Men who care not for doctrines, can understand a forgiving temper.

Would we grow in grace ourselves, and become more holy in all our ways, words, and works? Let us remember this passage. nothing so grieves the Holy Spirit, and brings spiritual darkness over the soul, as giving way to a quarrelsome and unforgiving temper. (Ephes. 4:30-32.)



Jesus healed two blind men outside Jericho before entering Jerusalem

Chapter 19

19. Instructions of the rejected Kinf-divorce

Verses 1-15. Concerning divorce

MATTHEW 19:1-15

It happened when Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee, and came into the borders of Judea beyond the Jordan. Great multitudes followed him, and he healed them there. Pharisees came to him, testing him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?"

He answered, "Haven't you read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall join to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?' So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, don't let man tear apart."

They asked him, "Why then did Moses command us to give her a bill of divorce, and divorce her?"

He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so. I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery."

His disciples said to him, "If this is the case of the man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry."

But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He who is able to receive it, let him receive it."

Then little children were brought to him, that he should lay his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, "Allow the little children, and don't forbid them to come to me; for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these." He laid his hands on them, and departed from there.

In these verses we have the mind of Christ declared on two subjects of great moment. One is the relation of husband and wife. The other is the light in which we should regard little children, in the matter of their souls.

It is difficult to overrate the importance of these two subjects. The well-being of nations, and the happiness of society, are closely connected with right views upon them. Nations are nothing but a collection of families. The good order of families depends entirely on keeping up the highest standard of respect for the marriage tie, and on the right training of children. We ought to be thankful, that on both these points, the great Head of the Church has pronounced judgment so clearly.

With respect to marriage, our Lord teaches, that the union of husband and wife ought never to be broken off, except for the greatest of all causes, namely, actual unfaithfulness.

In the days when our Lord was upon earth, divorces were permitted among the Jews for the most trifling and frivolous causes. The practice, though tolerated by Moses, to prevent worse evils--such as cruelty or murder--had gradually become an enormous abuse, and no doubt led to much immorality.

(Malachi 2:14-16.) The remark made by our Lord's disciples shows the deplorably low state of public feeling on the subject. They said, "If this is the case of the man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." They meant of course, "if a man may not put away his wife for a slight cause at any time, he had better not marry at all." Such language from the mouths of apostles sounds strange indeed!

Our Lord brings forward a widely different standard for the guidance of His disciples. He first founds His judgment on the original institution of marriage. He quotes the words used in the beginning of Genesis, where the creation of man, and the union of Adam and Eve, are described, as a proof that no relation should be so highly regarded as that of husband and wife. The relation of parent and child may seem very close, but there is one closer still--"A man shall leave father and mother, and cleave to His wife." He then backs up the quotation by His own solemn words, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder." And finally He brings in the grave charge of breaking the seventh commandment, against marriage contracted after a divorce for light and frivolous causes--"whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery."

It is clear, from the whole tenor of the passage, that the relationship of marriage ought to be highly reverenced and honored among Christians. It is a relationship which was instituted in Paradise, in the time of man's innocency, and is a chosen figure of the mystical union between Christ and His Church. It is a relationship which nothing but death ought to terminate. It is a relationship which is sure to have the greatest influence on those whom it brings together, for happiness, or for misery, for good, or for evil. Such a relationship ought never to be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly; but soberly, discreetly, and with due consideration. It is only too true, that thoughtlessly entering into marriage is one of the most fertile causes of unhappiness, and too often, it may be feared, of sin.

With respect to little CHILDREN, we find our Lord instructing us in these verses, both by word and deed, both by precept and example. "Little children were brought to him, that he should lay his hands on them and pray." They were evidently tender infants, too young to receive instruction, but not too young to receive benefit by prayer. The disciples seem to have thought them beneath their Master's notice, and rebuked those that brought them. But this drew forth a solemn declaration from the great Head of the Church--"Allow the little children, and don't forbid them to come to me; for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these."

There is something deeply interesting both in the language and action of our Lord on this occasion. We know the weakness and feebleness, both in mind and body, of a little infant. Of all creatures born into the world none is so helpless and dependent. We know who it was who here took such notice of infants, and found time, in His busy ministry among grown up men and women, to "lay his hands on them and pray." It was the eternal Son of God, the great High Priest, the King of kings, by whom all things consist, "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person." What an instructive picture the whole transaction places before our eyes! No wonder that the great majority of the Church of Christ have always seen in this passage, a strong, though indirect, argument in favour of infant baptism.

Let us learn from these verses, that the Lord Jesus cares tenderly for the souls of little children. It is probable that Satan specially hates them. It is certain that Jesus specially loves them. Young as they are, they are not beneath his thoughts, and attention. That mighty heart of his has room for the babe in its cradle, as well as for the king on his throne. He regards each one as possessing within its little body an undying principle, that will outlive the Pyramids of Egypt, and see sun and moon quenched at the last day. With such a passage as this before us, we may surely hope well about the salvation of all who die in infancy. "The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these."

Finally, let us draw from these verses encouragement to attempt great things in the religious instruction of children. Let us begin from their very earliest years to deal with them as having souls to be lost, or saved, and strive to bring them to Christ. Let us make them acquainted with the Bible, as soon as they can understand anything. Let us pray with them, and pray for them, and teach them to pray for themselves. We may rest assured that Jesus looks with pleasure on such endeavours, and is ready to bless them. We may rest assured that such endeavours are not in vain. The seed sown in infancy, is often found after many days. Happy is that church whose infant members are cared for as much as the oldest communicants! The blessing of Him that was crucified will surely be on that church! He put His hands on little children. He prayed for them.

Verses 16-26. The rich young man

MATTHEW 19:16-22

Behold, a man came to Jesus and said, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

He said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

He said to him, "Which ones?"

Jesus said, "'You shall not murder.' 'You shall not commit adultery.' 'You shall not steal.' 'You shall not give false testimony.''Honor your father and mother.' And, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The young man said to him, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions.

These verses detail a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and a young man, who came to Him to inquire about the way to eternal life. Like every conversation recorded in the Gospels, between our Lord and an individual, it deserves special attention. Salvation is an individual business. Every one who wishes to be saved, must have private personal dealings with Christ about his own soul.

We see, for one thing, from the case of this young man, that a person may have desires after salvation, and yet not be saved. Here is one who in a day of abounding unbelief comes of his own accord to Christ. He comes not to have a sickness healed. He comes not to plead about a child. He comes about his own soul. He opens the conference with the frank question, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Surely we might have thought, "this is a promising case--this is no prejudiced ruler or Pharisee--this is a hopeful inquirer." Yet by and bye this very young man "goes away sorrowful"--and we never read a word to show that he was converted!

We must never forget that good feelings alone in religion are not the grace of God. We may know the truth intellectually. We may often feel pierced in

conscience. We may have religious affections awakened within us, have many anxieties about our souls, and shed many tears. But all this is not conversion. It is not the genuine, saving work of the Holy Spirit.

Unhappily this is not all that must be said on this point. Not only are good feelings alone not grace, but they are even decidedly dangerous, if we content ourselves with them, and do not act as well as feel. It is a profound remark of that mighty master on moral questions, Bishop Butler, that passive impressions often repeated, gradually lose all their power. Actions often repeated produce a habit in man's mind. Feelings often indulged in, without leading to corresponding actions, will finally exercise no influence at all.

Let us apply this lesson to our own state. Perhaps we know what it is to feel religious fears, wishes, and desires. Let us beware that we do not rest in them. Let us never be satisfied until we have the witness of the Spirit in our hearts, that we are actually born again and new creatures. Let us never rest until we know that we have really repented, and laid hold on the hope set before us in the Gospel. It is good to feel. But it is far better to be converted.

We see, for another thing, from this young man's case, that an unconverted person is often profoundly ignorant on spiritual subjects. Our Lord refers this inquirer to the eternal standard of right and wrong, the moral law. Seeing that he speaks so boldly about "doing," Jesus tries him by a command well calculated to draw out the real state of his heart, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He even repeats to him the second table of the law. And at once the young man confidently replies, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?" So utterly ignorant is he of the spirituality of God's statutes, that he never doubts that he has perfectly fulfilled them. He seems thoroughly unaware that the commandments apply to the thoughts and words, as well as to the deeds, and that if God were to enter into judgment with him, he could "not answer Him one of a thousand!" (Job 9:3.) How dark must his mind have been as to the nature of God's law! How low must his ideas have been as to the holiness which God requires!

It is a melancholy fact, that ignorance like that of this young man is only too common in the Church of Christ. There are thousands of baptized people, who know no more of the leading doctrines of Christianity than the basest heathen. Tens of thousands fill churches and chapels weekly, who are utterly in the dark as to the full extent of man's sinfulness. They cling obstinately to the old notion, that in some sort or other their own doings can save them--and when ministers visit them on their death-beds, they prove as blind as if they had never heard

truth at all. So true is it, that the "natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him." (1 Cor. 2:14.)

We see in the last place, from this young man's case, that one idol cherished in the heart may ruin a soul forever. Our Lord, who knew what was in man, at last shows His inquirer his besetting sin. The same searching voice which said to the Samaritan woman, "Go, call your husband," (John 4:16,) says to the young man, "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor." At once the weak point in his character is detected. It turns out that, with all his wishes and desires after eternal life, there was one thing he loved better than his soul, and that was his money. He cannot stand the test. He is weighed in the balance and found lacking. And the history ends with the melancholy words, "He went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions."

We have in this history one more proof of the truth, "The love of money is the root of all evil." (1 Tim. 6:10.) We must place this young man in our memories by the side of Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and learn to beware of covetousness. Alas! it is a rock on which thousands are continually making shipwreck. There is hardly a minister of the Gospel who could not point to many in his congregation, who, humanly speaking, are "not far from the kingdom of God." But they never seem to make progress. They wish. They feel. They intend. They hope. But there they stick fast! And why? Because they are fond of money.

Let us prove our own selves, as we leave the passage. Let us see how it concerns our own souls. Are we honest and sincere in our professed desire to be true Christians? Have we given up all our idols? Is there no secret sin that we are silently clinging to, and refusing to give up? Is there no thing or person that we are privately loving more than Christ and our souls? These are questions that ought to be answered. The true explanation of the unsatisfactory state of many hearers of the Gospel, is spiritual idolatry. John might well say, "Keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21.)

Verses 27-30. Rewards in the renewal

MATTHEW 19:23-30

Jesus said to his disciples, "Most certainly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

Looking at them, Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Then Peter answered, "Behold, we have left everything, and followed you. What then will we have?"

Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life. But many will be last who are first; and first who are last.

The first thing that we learn in these verses, is the immense danger which riches bring on the souls of those that possess them. The Lord Jesus declares, that "A rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty." He goes even further. He uses a proverbial saying to strengthen His assertion--"It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

Few of our Lord's sayings sound more startling than this. Few run more counter to the opinions and prejudices of mankind. Few are so little believed. Yet this saying is true, and worthy of all acceptance. Riches, which all desire to obtain--riches, for which men labour and toil, and become gray before their time--riches are a most perilous possession. They often inflict great injury on the soul. They lead men into many temptations. They engross men's thoughts and affections. They bind heavy burdens on the heart, and make the way to heaven even more difficult than it naturally is.

Let us beware of the love of money. It is possible to use it well, and do good with it. But for each one who makes a right use of money, there are thousands who make a wrong use of it, and do harm both to themselves and others. Let the worldly man, if he will, make an idol of money, and count him happiest who has most of it. But let the Christian, who professes to have "treasure in heaven," set his face like a flint against the spirit of the world in this matter. Let him not worship gold. He is not the best man in God's eyes who has most money, but he who has most grace.

Let us pray daily for rich men's souls. They are not to be envied. They are deeply to be pitied. They carry heavy weights in the Christian race. They are of

all men the least likely "so to run as to obtain." (1 Cor. 9:24.) Their prosperity in this world is often their destruction in the world to come. Well may the Litany of the Church of England contain the words, "In all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us."

The second thing that we learn in this passage, is the almighty power of God's grace in the soul. The disciples were amazed, when they heard our Lord's language about rich men. It was language so subversive of all their notions about the advantages of wealth, that they cried out with surprise, "Who then can be saved?" They drew from our Lord a gracious answer, "With men this is impossible--but with God all things are possible."

The Holy Spirit can incline even the richest of men to seek treasure in heaven. He can dispose even kings to cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, and count all things but loss for the sake of the kingdom of God. Proof upon proof of this is given to us in the Bible. Abraham was very rich, yet he was the father of the faithful. Moses might have been a prince or king in Egypt, but he forsook all his brilliant prospects for the sake of Him who is invisible. Job was the wealthiest man in the east, yet he was a chosen servant of God. David, Jehoshaphat, Josiah, Hezekiah, were all wealthy monarchs, but they loved God's favour more than their earthly greatness. They all show us that "nothing is too hard for the Lord," and that faith can grow even in the most unlikely soil.

Let us hold fast this doctrine, and never let it go. No man's place or circumstances shut him out from the kingdom of God. Let us never despair of any one's salvation. No doubt rich people require special grace, and are exposed to special temptations. But the Lord God of Abraham, and Moses, and Job, and David has not changed. He who saved them in spite of their riches, can save others also. When He works, who shall hinder it? (Isaiah 43:13.)

The last thing that we learn in these verses, is the immense encouragement the Gospel offers to those who give up everything for Christ's sake. We are told that Peter asked our Lord what he and the other apostles, who had forsaken their little 'all' for His sake, should receive in return. He obtained a most gracious reply. A full recompense shall be made to all who make sacrifices for Christ's sake--they "will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life."

There is something very cheering in this promise. Few in the present day, excepting converts among the heathen, are ever required to forsake homes, relations, and lands, on account of their religion. Yet there are few true Christians, who have not much to go through, in one way or another, if they are really faithful to their Lord. The offence of the cross has not yet ceased.

Laughter, ridicule, mockery, and family-persecution, are often the portion of an English believer. The favour of the world is often forfeited, places and situations are often imperilled, by a conscientious adherence to the demands of the Gospel of Christ. All who are exposed to trials of this kind may take comfort in the promise of these verses. Jesus foresaw their need, and intended these words to be their consolation.

We may rest assured that no man shall ever be a real loser by following Christ. The believer may seem to suffer loss for a time, when he first begins the life of a decided Christian. He may be much cast down by the afflictions that are brought upon him on account of his religion. But let him rest assured that he will never find himself a loser in the long run. Christ can raise up friends for us who shall more than compensate for those we lose. Christ can open hearts and homes to us, far more warm and hospitable than those that are closed against us. Above all, Christ can give us peace of conscience, inward joy, bright hopes, and happy feelings, which shall far outweigh every pleasant earthly thing that we have cast away for His sake. He has pledged His royal word that it shall be so. None ever found that word fail. Let us trust it, and not be afraid.

Chapter 20

20. Instructions of the rejected King – the labourers

Verses 1-16. Parable of the labourers

MATTHEW 20:1-16

"For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who was the master of a household, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. He went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. To them he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. About the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle. He said to them, 'Why do you stand here all day idle?'

"They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.'

"He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and you will receive whatever is right.' When evening had come, the master of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning from the last to the first.'

"When those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came, they each received a denarius. When the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise each received a denarius. When they received it, they murmured against the master of the household, saying, 'These last have spent only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat!'

"But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Didn't you agree with me for a denarius? Take that which is yours, and go your way. It is my desire to give to this last just as much as to you. Isn't it lawful for me to do what I want to with what I own? Or is your eye envious, because I am good?' So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen."

There are undeniable difficulties in the parable contained in these verses. The key to the right explanation of them must be sought in the passage which concludes the last chapter. There we find the apostle Peter asking our Lord a remarkable question--"Behold, we have left everything, and followed you. What then will we have?" There we find Jesus giving a remarkable answer. He makes a special promise to Peter and his fellow disciples--"they should one day sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." He makes a general promise to all who suffer loss for His sake--"they will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life."

Now we must bear in mind that Peter was a Jew. Like most Jews, he had probably been brought up in much ignorance as to God's purposes respecting the salvation of the Gentiles. In fact, we know from the Acts, that it required a vision from heaven to take that ignorance away. (Acts 10:28.) Furthermore we must bear in mind that Peter and his fellow-disciples were weak in faith and knowledge. They were probably apt to attach a great importance to their own sacrifices for Christ's sake, and inclined to self-righteousness and self-conceit. Both these points our Lord knew well. He therefore speaks this parable for the special benefit of Peter and his companions. He read their hearts. He saw what spiritual medicine those hearts required, and supplied it without delay. In a word, He checked their rising pride, and taught them humility.

In expounding this parable, we need not inquire closely into the meaning of the "denarius," the "market-place," the "steward," or the "hours." Such inquiries often darken counsel by words without knowledge. Well says Calovius, "the theology of parables is not argumentative." The hint of Chrysostom deserves notice. He says, "It is not right to search curiously, and word by word, into all things in a parable but when we have learned the object for which it was composed, to reap this, and not to busy ourselves about anything further." Two

main lessons appear to stand out on the face of the parable, and to embrace the general scope of its meaning. Let us content ourselves with these two.

We learn, in the first place, that in the calling of NATIONS to the professed knowledge of Himself, God exercises, free, sovereign, and unconditional grace. He calls the families of the earth into the visible church at His own time, and in His own way.

We see this truth wonderfully brought out in the history of God's dealings with the world. We see the children of Israel called and chosen to be God's people in the very beginning of "the day." We see some of the Gentiles called at a later period, by the preaching of the apostles. We see others being called in the present age, by the labours of missionaries. We see others, like the millions of Chinese and Hindoos, still "standing idle, because no man has hired them." And why is all this? We cannot tell. We only know that God loves to hide pride from churches, and to take away all occasion of boasting. He will never allow the older branches of His church to look contemptuously on the younger. His Gospel holds out pardon and peace with God through Christ to the heathen of our own times, as fully as it did to Paul. The converted inhabitants of New Zealand shall be as fully admitted to heaven as the holiest patriarch who died 3500 years ago. The old wall between Jews and Gentiles is removed. There is nothing to prevent the believing heathen being "a fellow-heir and partaker of the same hope" with the believing Israelite. The Gentiles converted at "the eleventh hour" of the world, shall be as really and truly heirs of glory as the Jews. They shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while many of the children of the kingdom are forever cast out. "The last shall indeed be first."

We learn, in the second place, that in the saving of INDIVIDUALS, as well as in the calling of nations, God acts as a sovereign, and gives no account of His matters. He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and that too at His own time. (Rom. 9:15.)

This is a truth which we see illustrated on every side in the church of Christ, as a matter of experience. We see one man called to repentance and faith in the beginning of his days, like Timothy, and labouring in the Lord's vineyard for forty or fifty years. We see another man called "at the eleventh hour," like the thief on the cross, and plucked like a brand out of the fire--one day a hard impenitent sinner, and the next day in paradise. And yet the whole tenor of the Gospel leads us to believe that both these men are equally forgiven before God. Both are equally washed in Christ's blood, and clothed in Christ's righteousness.

Both are equally justified, both accepted, and both will be found at Christ's right hand in the last day.

There can be no doubt that this doctrine sounds strange to the ignorant and inexperienced Christian. It confounds the pride of human nature. It leaves the self-righteous no room to boast. It is a leveling, humbling doctrine, and gives occasion to many a murmur. But it is impossible to reject it, unless we reject the whole Bible. True faith in Christ, though it be but a day old, justifies a man before God as completely as the faith of him who has followed Christ for fifty years. The righteousness in which Timothy will stand at the day of judgment, is the same as that of the penitent thief. Both will be saved by grace alone. Both will owe all to Christ. We may not like this. But it is the doctrine of this parable, and not of this parable only, but of the whole New Testament. Happy is he who can receive the doctrine with humility! Well says Bishop Hall, "If some have cause to magnify God's bounty, none have cause to complain."

Before we leave this parable, let us arm our minds with some necessary cautions. It is a portion of Scripture that is frequently perverted and misapplied. Men have often drawn from it, not milk, but poison.

Let us beware of supposing, from anything in this parable, that salvation is in the slightest degree to be obtained by works. To suppose this is to overthrow the whole teaching of the Bible. Whatever a believer receives in the next world, is a matter of grace, and not of debt. God is never a debtor to us, in any sense whatever. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants. (Luke 17:10.)

Let us beware of supposing, from this parable, that the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is entirely done away by the Gospel. To suppose this is to contradict many plain prophecies, both of the Old Testament and New. In the matter of justification, there is no distinction between the believing Jew and the Greek. Yet Israel is still a special people, and not "numbered among the nations." God has many purposes concerning the Jews, which are yet to be fulfilled.

Let us beware of supposing, from this parable, that all saved souls will have the same degree of glory. To suppose this, is to contradict many plain texts of Scripture. The title of all believers no doubt is the same--the righteousness of Christ. But all will not have the same place in heaven. "Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labor." (1 Cor. 3:8.)

Finally, let us beware of supposing from this parable, that it is safe for any one to put off repentance until the end of his days. To suppose this is a most

dangerous delusion. The longer men refuse to obey Christ's voice, the less likely they are to be saved. "Now is the accepted time--now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2.) Few are ever saved on their death-beds. One thief on the cross was saved, that none should despair; but only one, that none should presume. A false confidence in those words, "the eleventh hour," has ruined thousands of souls.

Verses 17-28. Jesus again predicts His death and resurrection

MATTHEW 20:17-23

As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and will hand him over to the Gentiles to mock, to scourge, and to crucify; and the third day he will be raised up."

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, kneeling and asking a certain thing of him. He said to her, "What do you want?"

She said to him, "Command that these, my two sons, may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand, in your Kingdom."

But Jesus answered, "You don't know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

They said to him, "We are able."

He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it is for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

The first thing we should notice in these verses, is the clear announcement which the Lord Jesus Christ makes of His own approaching death. For the third time we find Him telling His disciples the astounding truth, that He, their wonder-working Master, must soon suffer and die.

The Lord Jesus KNEW from the beginning, all that was before Him. The treachery of Judas Iscariot--the fierce persecution of the chief-priests and scribes--the unjust judgment--the delivery to Pontius Pilate--the mocking--the scourging--the crown of thorns--the cross--the hanging between two malefactors--the nails--the spear--all, all were spread before His mind like a picture.

How great an aggravation of suffering fore-knowledge is, those know well who have lived in the prospect of some fearful surgical operation. Yet none of these things moved our Lord. He says, "I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the strikers, and my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair--I didn't hide my face from shame and spitting." (Isaiah 50:5, 6.) He saw Calvary in the distance all His life through, and yet walked calmly up to it, without turning to the right hand or to the left. Surely there never was sorrow like unto His sorrow, or love like His love.

The Lord Jesus was a VOLUNTARY sufferer. When He died on the cross, it was not because He had not power to prevent it. He suffered intentionally, deliberately, and of His own free-will. (John 10:18.) He knew that without shedding of His blood there could be no remission of man's sin. He knew that He was the Lamb of God, who must die to take away the sin of the world. He knew that His death was the appointed sacrifice, which must be offered up to make reconciliation for iniquity. Knowing all this, He went willingly to the cross. His heart was set on finishing the mighty work He came into the world to do. He was well aware that all hinged on His own death, and that, without that death, His miracles and preaching would have done comparatively nothing for the world. No wonder that He thrice pressed on the attention of His disciples that He "must" die. Blessed and happy are they who know the real meaning and importance of the sufferings of Christ!

The next thing that we should notice in these verses, is the mixture of ignorance and faith that may be found, even in true-hearted Christians. We see the mother of James and John coming to our Lord with her two sons, and proposing on their behalf a strange petition. She asks that they "may sit, one on His right hand, and the other on His left in His kingdom." She seems to have forgotten all He had just been saying about His suffering. Her eager mind can think of nothing but His glory. His plain warnings about the crucifixion, appear to have been thrown away on her sons. Their thoughts were full of nothing but His throne, and the day of His power. There was much of faith in their request, but there was much more of infirmity. There was something to be commended, in that they could see in Jesus of Nazareth a coming king. But there was also much to blame, in that they did not remember that He was to be crucified before He could reign. Truly the flesh lusts against the spirit in all God's children, and Luther well remarks, "the flesh ever seeks to be glorified before it is crucified."

There are many Christians, who are very like this woman and her sons. They see in part, and know in part, the things of God. They have faith enough to follow Christ. They have knowledge enough to hate sin, and come out from the world. And yet there are many truths of Christianity, of which they are

deplorably ignorant. They talk ignorantly, they act ignorantly, and commit many sad mistakes. Their acquaintance with the Bible is very scanty. Their insight into their own hearts is very small. But we must learn from these verses to deal gently with such people, because the Lord has received them. We must not set them down as graceless and godless, because of their ignorance. We must remember that true faith may lie at the bottom of their hearts, though there is much rubbish at the top. We must reflect that the sons of Zebedee, whose knowledge was at one time so imperfect, became at a later period pillars of the Church of Christ. Just so a believer may begin his course in much darkness, and yet prove finally a man mighty in the Scriptures, and a worthy follower of James and John.

The last thing that we should notice in these verses, is the solemn reproof which our Lord gives to the ignorant request of the mother of Zebedee's children and her two sons. He says to them, "You don't know what you are asking." They had asked to share in their Master's reward, but they had not considered that they must first be partakers in their Master's sufferings. (1 Pet 4:13.) They had forgotten that those who would stand with Christ in glory, must drink of His cup of suffering, and be baptized with His baptism. They did not see that those who carry the cross, and those alone, shall receive the crown. Well might our Lord say, "You don't know what you are asking."

But do we never commit the same mistake that the sons of Zebedee committed? Do we never fall into their error, and make thoughtless, inconsiderate requests? Do we not often say things in prayer without "counting the cost," and ask for things to be granted to us, without reflecting how much our supplications involve? These are heart-searching questions. It may well be feared that many of us cannot give them a satisfactory answer.

We ask that our souls may be saved and go to heaven, when we die. It is a good request indeed. But are we prepared to take up the cross, and follow Christ? Are we willing to give up the world for His sake? Are we ready to put off the old man, and put on the new--to fight, to labour, and to run so as to obtain? Are we ready to withstand a taunting world, and endure hardships for Christ's sake? What shall we say? If we are not so ready, our Lord might say to us also, "You don't know what you are asking."

We ask that God would make us holy. It is a good request indeed. But are we prepared to be sanctified by any process that God in His wisdom may call on us to pass through? Are we ready to be purified by affliction, weaned from the world by bereavements, drawn nearer to God by losses, sicknesses, and sorrow?

Alas! these are hard questions. But if we are not, our Lord might well say to us, "You don't know what you are asking."

Let us leave these verses with a solemn resolution to consider well what we are about, when we draw near to God in prayer. Let us beware of thoughtless, inconsiderate and rash petitions. Well might Solomon say, "Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter anything before God." (Eccles. 5:2.)

Verses 29-34. Two blind men healed

MATTHEW 20:24-28

When the ten heard it, they were indignant with the two brothers.

But Jesus summoned them, and said, "You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

These verses are few in number, but they contain lessons of great importance to all professing Christians. Let us see what they are.

In the first place we learn, that there may be pride, jealousy, and love of pre-eminence even among true disciples of Christ. What says the Scripture? "When the ten heard" what James and John had asked, "they were indignant with the two brothers."

Pride is one of the oldest and most mischievous of sins. By it the angels fell--for "they kept not their first estate." (Jude 6.) Through pride Adam and Eve were seduced into eating the forbidden fruit. They were not content with their lot, and thought "they would be as Gods." From pride the saints of God receive their greatest injuries after their conversion. Well says Hooker, "Pride is a vice, which cleaves so fast unto the heart of men, that if we were to strip ourselves off all faults, one by one, we should undoubtedly find it the very last and hardest to put off." It is a quaint but true saying of Bishop Hall, that "pride is the inmost coat, which we take off last, and which we put on first."

In the second place we learn, that a life of self-denying kindness to others is the true secret of greatness in the kingdom of Christ. What says the Scripture?

"Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your slave."

The standard of the world, and the standard of the Lord Jesus, are indeed widely different. They are more than different. They are flatly contradictory one to the other. Among the children of this world, he is thought the greatest man who has most land, most money, most servants, most rank, and most earthly power. Among the children of God, he is reckoned the greatest who does most to promote the spiritual and temporal happiness of his fellow-creatures. True greatness consists not in receiving, but in giving--not in selfish absorption of good things, but in imparting good to others--not in being served, but in serving--not in sitting still and being ministered to, but in going about and ministering to others.

The angels of God see far more beauty in the work of the Missionary, than in the work of the Australian digger for gold. They take far more interest in the labours of men like Howard and Judson, than in the victories of generals, the political speeches of statesmen, or the council-chambers of kings. Let us remember these things. Let us beware of seeking false greatness. Let as aim at that which alone is true. We may be sure there is profound wisdom in that saying of our Lord's, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35.)

In the third place, we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is intended to be the example of all true Christians. What says the Scripture? We ought to serve one another, "even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve."

The Lord God has mercifully provided His people with everything necessary to their sanctification. He has given those who follow after holiness the clearest of precepts, the best of motives, and the most encouraging of promises. But this is not all. He has furthermore supplied them with the most perfect pattern and example, even the life of His own Son. By that life he bids us model our own. In the steps of that life He bids us walk. (1 Peter 2:21.) It is the model after which we must strive to mould our tempers, our words, and our works, in this evil world. "Would my Master have spoken in this manner? Would my Master have behaved in this way?"--These are the questions by which we ought daily to test ourselves.

How humbling this truth is! What searchings of heart it ought to raise within us! What a loud call it is to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which most easily besets us!" What manner of people ought they to be who profess to copy Christ! What poor unprofitable religion is that which makes a man content with talking and empty profession, while his life is unholy and unclean! Alas! those

who know nothing of Christ, as an example, will find at last that He knows nothing of them as His saved people. "He that says he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked." (1 John 2:6.)

Finally, let us learn from these verses, that Christ's death was an atonement for sin. What says the Scripture? "The Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many."

This is the mightiest truth in the Bible. Let us take care that we grasp it firmly, and never let it go. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not die merely as a martyr, or as a splendid example of self-sacrifice and self-denial. Those who can see no more than that in His death, fall infinitely short of the truth. They lose sight of the very foundation-stone of Christianity, and miss the whole comfort of the Gospel. Christ died as a sacrifice for man's sin. He died to make reconciliation for man's iniquity. He died to purge our sins by the offering of Himself. He died to redeem us from the curse which we all deserved, and to make satisfaction to the justice of God, which must otherwise have condemned us. Never let us forget this!

We are all by nature debtors. We owe to our holy Maker ten thousand talents, and are not able to pay. We cannot atone for our own transgressions, for we are weak and frail, and only adding to our debts every day. But, blessed be God! what we could not do, Christ came into the world to do for us. What we could not pay, He undertook to pay for us. To pay it He died for us upon the cross. "He offered himself to God." (Heb. 9:14.) "He suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18.) Once more, never let us forget this!

Let us not leave these verses without asking ourselves, where is our humility? what is our idea of true greatness? what is our example? what is our hope? Life, eternal life, depends on the answer we give to these questions. Happy is that man who is truly humble, strives to do good in his day, walks in the steps of Jesus, and rests all his hopes on the ransom paid for him by Christ's blood. Such a man is a true Christian!

MATTHEW 20:29-34

As they went out from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. Behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, O son of David!" The multitude rebuked them, telling those who they should be quiet, but they cried out even more, "Lord, have mercy on us, O son of David!"

Jesus stood still, and called them, and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

They told him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened."

Jesus, being moved with compassion, touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received their sight, and they followed him.

In these verses we have a touching picture of an event in our Lord's history. He heals two blind men sitting by the wayside near Jericho. The circumstances of the event contain several deeply interesting lessons, which all professing Christians would do well to remember.

For one thing, let us mark what strong faith may sometimes be found, where it might least have been expected. Blind as these two men were, they believed that Jesus was able to help them. They never saw any of our Lord's miracles. They knew Him only by hear-say, and not face to face. And yet, as soon as they heard that He was passing by, they "cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, O son of David!"

Such faith may well put us to shame. With all our books of evidence, and lives of saints, and libraries of divinity, how few know anything of simple, childlike confidence in Christ's mercy and Christ's power. And even among those who are believers, the degree of faith is often strangely disproportionate to the privileges enjoyed. Many an unlearned man, who can only read his New Testament with difficulty, possesses the spirit of unhesitating trust in Christ's advocacy, while deeply-read divines are harassed by questionings and doubts. They who, humanly speaking, ought to be first, are often last, and the last first.

For another thing, let us mark what wisdom there is in using every opportunity for getting good for our souls. These blind men sat "by the wayside." Had they not done so, they might never have been healed. Jesus never returned to Jericho, and they might never have met with Him again.

Let us see, in this simple fact, the importance of diligence in the use of means of grace. Let us never neglect the house of God--never forsake the assembling of ourselves with God's people--never omit the reading of our Bibles--never let drop the practice of private prayer. These things, no doubt, will not save us without the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thousands make use of them, and remain dead in trespasses and sins. But it is just in the use of these things that souls are converted and saved. They are the ways in which Jesus walks.



The Dome of the Rock stands on the site of the Temple

Chapter 21

21. The rejected King enters Jerusalem

Verses 1-11. The royal entry into Jerusalem

MATTHEW 21:1-11

When they drew near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village that is opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them, and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and immediately he will send them."

All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold, your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went, and did just as Jesus commanded them, and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their clothes on them; and he sat on them. A very great multitude spread their clothes on the road. Others cut branches from the trees, and spread them on the road. The multitudes who went before him, and

who followed kept shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

When he had come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" The multitudes said, "This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

These verses contain a very remarkable passage in our Lord Jesus Christ's life. They describe His public entry into Jerusalem, when He came there for the last time, before He was crucified.

There is something peculiarly striking in this incident in our Lord's history. The narrative reads like the account of some royal conqueror's return to his own city. "A very great multitude" accompanies him in a kind of triumphal procession. Loud cries and expressions of praise are heard around him. "All the city was stirred up." The whole transaction is singularly at variance with the past tenor of our Lord's life. It is curiously unlike the ways of Him who did not "cry, nor strive, nor let His voice be heard in the streets"--who withdrew Himself from the multitude on other occasions--and said to those He healed, "see that you say nothing to any man." (Mark 1:44.) And yet the whole transaction admits of explanation. The reasons of this public entry are not hard to find out. Let us see what they were.

The plain truth is, that our Lord knew well that the time of His earthly ministry was drawing to a close. He knew that the hour was approaching when He must finish the mighty work He came to do, by dying for our sins upon the cross. He knew that His last journey had been accomplished, and that there remained nothing now in His earthly ministry, but to be offered as a sacrifice on Calvary. Knowing all this, He no longer, as in time past, sought secrecy. Knowing all this, He thought it good to enter the place where He was to be delivered to death, with peculiar solemnity and publicity. It was not fitting that the Lamb of God should come to be slain on Calvary privately and silently. Before the great sacrifice for the sins of the world was offered up, it was right that every eye should be fixed on the victim. It was suitable that the crowning act of our Lord's life should be done with as much notoriety as possible. Therefore it was that He made this public entry. Therefore it was that He attracted to himself the eyes of the wondering multitude. Therefore it was that all Jerusalem was moved. The atoning blood of the Lamb of God was about to be shed. The deed was not to be "done in a corner." (Acts 26:26.)

It is good to remember these things. The real meaning of our Lord's conduct at this period of His history is not sufficiently considered by many readers of

this passage. It remains for In the first place, let us notice in these verses an example of our Lord Jesus Christ's perfect knowledge. He sends His two disciples into a village. He tells them that they will there find the donkey on which he was to ride. He provides them with an answer to the inquiry of those to whom the donkey belonged. He tells those who on giving that answer the donkey will be sent. And all happens exactly as He foretells.

There is nothing hidden from the Lord's eyes. There are no secrets with Him. Alone or in company, by night or by day, in private or in public, He is acquainted with all our ways. He who saw Nathanael under the fig-tree is unchanged. Go where we will, and retire from the world as we may, we are never out of sight of Christ.

This is a thought that ought to exercise a restraining and sanctifying effect on our souls. We all know the influence which the presence of the rulers of this world has upon their subjects. Nature itself teaches us to put a check on our tongues, and demeanour, and behaviour, when we are under the eye of a king. The sense of our Lord Jesus Christ's perfect knowledge of all our ways, ought to have the same effect upon our hearts. Let us do nothing we would not like Christ to see, and say nothing we would not like Christ to hear. Let us seek to live and move and have our being under a continual recollection of Christ's presence. Let us behave as we would have done had we walked beside Him, in the company of James and John, by the sea of Galilee. This is the way to be trained for heaven. In heaven, "we shall ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:17.)

In the second place, let us notice in these verses an example of the manner in which prophecies concerning our Lord's first coming were fulfilled. We are told that His public entry fulfilled the words of Zechariah, "Your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey."

It appears that this prediction was literally and exactly fulfilled. The words which the prophet spoke by the Holy Spirit received no figurative accomplishment. As he said, so it came to pass. As he foretold, so it was done. Five hundred and fifty years had passed away since the prediction was made--and then, when the appointed time arrived, the long-promised Messiah did literally ride into Zion on an donkey. No doubt the vast majority of the inhabitants of Jerusalem saw nothing in the circumstance. The veil was upon their hearts. But we are not left in doubt as to the fulfilment of the prophecy. We are told plainly, "all this was done that it might be fulfilled."

From the fulfilment of God's word in time past, we are surely intended to gather something as to the manner of its fulfilment in time to come. We have a

right to expect that prophecies respecting the second advent of Christ, will be as literally fulfilled as those respecting His first advent. He came to this earth literally in person the first time. He will come to this earth literally in person the second time. He came in humiliation once literally to suffer. He will come again in glory literally to reign. Every prediction respecting things accompanying His first advent was literally accomplished. It will be just the same when He returns. All that is foretold about the restoration of the Jews--the judgments on the ungodly--the unbelief of the world, the gathering of the elect--shall be made good to the letter. Let us not forget this. In the study of unfulfilled prophecy, a fixed principle of interpretation is of the first importance.

Finally, let us notice in these verses a striking example of the worthlessness of man's favour. Of all the multitudes who crowded round our Lord as He entered Jerusalem, none stood by Him when He was delivered into the hands of wicked men. Many cried, "Hosanna!" who four days after cried, "away with Him, crucify Him!"

But this is a faithful picture of human nature. This is a proof of the utter folly of thinking more of the praise of man than the praise of God. Nothing is so fickle and uncertain as popularity. It is here today and gone tomorrow. It is a sandy foundation, and sure to fail those who build upon it. Let us not care for it. Let us seek the favour of Him who is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever." (Heb. 13:8.) Christ never changes. Those whom He loves, He loves to the end. His favour endures forever.

Verses 12-32. Second cleansing of the temple and the fig tree cursed

MATTHEW 21:12-22

Jesus entered into the temple area, and drove out all of those who sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the money changers' tables and the seats of those who sold the doves. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers!"

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children who were crying in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the son of David!" they were indignant, and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?"

Jesus said to them, "Yes. Did you never read, 'Out of the mouth of children and infants you have perfected praise?'"

He left them, and went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there. Now in the morning, as he returned to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he came to it, and found nothing on it but leaves. He said to it, "Let there be no fruit from you forever!"

Immediately the fig tree withered away. When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree immediately wither away?"

Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, if you have faith, and don't doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you told this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it would be done. All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

We have in these verses an account of two remarkable events in our Lord's history. In both, there was something eminently figurative and typical. Each was an emblem of spiritual things. Beneath the surface of each, lie lessons of solemn instruction.

The first event that demands our attention, is our Lord's visit to the temple. He found His Father's house in a state which too truly shadowed forth the general condition of the whole Jewish church--everything out of order, and out of course. He found the courts of that holy building disgracefully profaned by worldly transactions. Trading, and buying, and selling, were actually going on within its walls. There stood dealers ready to supply the Jew who came from distant countries, with any sacrifice he wanted. There sat the money-changer, ready to change his foreign money for the current coin of the land. Bulls, and sheep, and goats, and pigeons, were there exposed for sale, as if the place had been a market. The jingling of money might there be heard, as if these holy courts had been a bank or an exchange.

Such were the scenes that met our Lord's eyes. He saw it all with holy indignation. "He drove out all of those who sold and bought." He "overthrew the money changers' tables." Resistance there was none, for men knew that He was right. Objection there was none, for all felt that he was only reforming a notorious abuse, which had been basely permitted for the sake of gain. Well might He sound in the ears of the astonished traders, as they fled from the temple--"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers!"

Let us see in our Lord's conduct on this occasion, a striking type of what He will do when He comes again the second time. He will purify His visible church as He purified the temple. He will cleanse it from everything that defiles and

works iniquity, and cast every worldly professor out of its pale. He will allow no worshiper of money, or lover of gain, to have a place in that glorious temple, which He will finally exhibit before the world. May we all strive to live in the daily expectation of that coming! May we judge ourselves, that we be not condemned and cast out in that searching and sifting day! We should often study those words of Malachi--"Who can endure the day of His coming? and who will stand when He appears? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's soap." (Mal. 3:2.)

The second event that demands our attention in these verses, is our Lord's curse upon the fruitless fig-tree. We are told, that being hungry He came to a fig-tree in the way, and "found nothing on it but leaves. He said to it, 'Let there be no fruit from you forever!' Immediately the fig tree withered away." This is an incident almost without parallel in all our Lord's ministry. It is almost the only occasion on which we find Him making one of His creatures suffer, in order to teach a spiritual truth. There was a heart-searching lesson in that withered fig-tree. It preaches a sermon we shall all do well to hear.

That fig-tree, full of leaves, but barren of fruit, was a striking emblem of the Jewish church, when our Lord was upon earth. The Jewish church had everything to make an outward show. It had the temple, the priesthood, the daily service, the yearly feasts, the Old Testament Scriptures, the rituals of the Levites, the morning and evening sacrifice. But beneath these goodly leaves, the Jewish church was utterly destitute of fruit. It had no grace, no faith, no love, no humility, no spirituality, no real holiness, no willingness to receive its Messiah. (John 1:11.) And hence, like the fig-tree, the Jewish church was soon to wither away. It was to be stripped of all its outward ornaments, and its members scattered over the face of the earth. Jerusalem was to be destroyed. The temple was to be burned. The daily sacrifice was to be taken away. The tree was to wither away to the very ground. And so it came to pass. Never was there a type so literally fulfilled. In every wandering Jew we see a branch of the fig-tree that was crushed.

But we may not stop here. We may find even more instruction in the event we are now considering. These things were written for our sakes, as well as for the Jews.

Is not every fruitless branch of Christ's visible church in an dreadful danger of becoming a withered fig-tree? Beyond doubt it is. High ecclesiastical profession, without holiness among the people--overweening confidence in councils, bishops, liturgies, and ceremonies, while repentance and faith have been neglected--have ruined many a visible church in time past, and may yet

ruin many more. Where are the once famous churches of Ephesus, and Sardis, and Carthage, and Hippo? They are all gone. They had leaves, but no fruit. Our Lord's curse came upon them. They became withered fig-trees. The decree went forth, "Hew them down." (Dan. 4:23.) Let us remember this. Let us beware of Church-pride. Let us not be high-minded, but fear. (Rom. 2:20.)

Finally, is not every fruitless professor of Christianity in dreadful danger of becoming a withered fig-tree? There can be no doubt of it. So long as a man is content with the leaves of religion--with a name to live while he is dead, and a form of godliness without the power--so long his soul is in great peril. So long as he is satisfied with going to church or chapel, and receiving the Lord's supper, and being called a Christian, while his heart is not changed, and his sins not forsaken--so long he is daily provoking God to cut him off without remedy. Fruit, fruit--the fruit of the Spirit, is the only sure proof that we are savingly united to Christ, and in the way to heaven. May this sink down into our hearts, and never be forgotten!

MATTHEW 21:23-32

When he had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you this authority?"

Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?"

They reasoned with themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all hold John to be a prophet." They answered Jesus, and said, "We don't know."

He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go work today in my vineyard.' He answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind, and went. He came to the second, and said the same thing. He answered, 'I go, sir,' but he didn't go. Which of the two did the will of his father?"

They said to him, "The first."

Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into the Kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. When you saw it, you didn't even repent afterward, that you might believe him.

These verses contain a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ, and the chief priests and elders of the people. Those bitter enemies of all righteousness saw the sensation which the public entry into Jerusalem, and the cleansing of the temple, had produced. At once they came around our Lord like bees, and endeavoured to find occasion for an accusation against Him.

Let us observe, in the first place, how ready the enemies of truth are to question the authority of all who do more good than themselves. The chief priests have not a word to say about our Lord's teaching. They make no charge against the lives or conduct of Himself or His followers. The point on which they fasten is his commission--"By what authority do you these things? and who gave you this authority?"

The same charge has often been made against the servants of God, when they have striven to check the progress of ecclesiastical corruption. It is the old weapon by which the children of this world have often laboured to stop the progress of revivals and reformations. It is the weapon which was often brandished in the face of the Reformers, the Puritans, and the Methodists of the last century. It is the poisoned arrow which is often shot at city-missionaries and lay-agents in the present day. Too many care nothing for the manifest blessing of God on man's work, so long as he is not sent forth by their own sect or party. It matters nothing to them, that some humble labourer in God's harvest can point to numerous conversions of souls through his instrumentality. They still cry, "By what authority do you these things?"

His success is nothing--they demand his commission. His cures are nothing--they require his diploma. Let us neither be surprised nor moved, when we hear such things. It is the old charge which was brought against Christ Himself. "There is no new thing under the sun." (Eccles. 1:9.)

Let us observe, in the second place, the consummate wisdom with which our Lord replied to the question put to Him. His enemies had asked Him for His authority for doing what He did. They doubtless intended to make His answer a handle for accusing Him. He knew the drift of their inquiry, and said, "I also will ask you one question, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what

authority I do these things. The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?"

We must distinctly understand, that in this answer of our Lord's there was no evasion. To suppose this is a great mistake. The counter question which He asked, was in reality an answer to His enemies' inquiry. He knew they dared not deny that John the Baptist was a man sent from God. He knew that, this being granted, he needed only to remind them of John's testimony to Himself. Had not John declared him to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?" Had not John pronounced Him to be the Mighty One, who was to "baptize with the Holy Spirit?" In short, our Lord's question was a home-thrust to the conscience of His enemies. If they once conceded the divine authority of John the Baptist's mission, they must also concede the divinity of His own. If they acknowledged that John came from heaven, they must acknowledge that Jesus Himself was the Christ.

Let us pray that, in this difficult world, we may be supplied with the same kind of wisdom which was here displayed by our Lord. No doubt we ought to act on the injunction of Peter, "and always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with humility and fear." (1 Peter 3:15.) We ought to shrink from no inquiry into the principles of our holy religion, and to be ready at any time to defend and explain our practice. But for all this, we must never forget that "wisdom is profitable to direct," and that we should strive to speak wisely in defense of a good cause. The words of Solomon deserve consideration--"Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him." (Prov. 26:4)

In the last place, let us observe in these verses, what immense encouragement our Lord holds out to those who repent. We see this strikingly brought out in the parable of the two sons. Both were told to go and work in their father's vineyard. One son, like the profligate publicans, for some time flatly refused obedience, but afterwards repented and went. The other, like the formal Pharisees, pretended willingness to go, but in reality went not. "Which of the two," says our Lord, "did the will of his father?" Even his enemies were obliged to reply, "the first."

Let it be a settled principle in our Christianity, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is infinitely willing to receive penitent sinners. It matters nothing what a man has been in time past. Does he repent, and come to Christ? Then old things are passed away, and all things are become new. It matters nothing how high and self-confident a man's profession of religion may be. Does he really give up his sins? If not, his profession is abominable in God's sight,

and he himself is still under the curse. Let us take courage ourselves, if we have been great sinners hitherto. Only let us repent and believe in Christ, and there is hope. Let us encourage others to repent. Let us hold the door wide open to the very chief of sinners. Never will that word fail, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.)

Verses 33-46. Parable of the landowner

MATTHEW 21:33-46

"Hear another parable. There was a man who was a master of a household, who planted a vineyard, set a hedge about it, dug a winepress in it, built a tower, leased it out to farmers, and went into another country. When the season for the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the farmers, to receive his fruit. The farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first--and they treated them the same way. But afterward he sent to them his son, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But the farmers, when they saw the son, said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and seize his inheritance.' So they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When therefore the master of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?"

They told him, "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will give him the fruit in its season."

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner. This was from the Lord. It is marvellous in our eyes?' "Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation bringing forth its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but on whoever it will fall, it will scatter him as dust."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he spoke about them. When they sought to seize him, they feared the multitudes, because they considered him to be a prophet.

The parable contained in these verses was spoken with special reference to the Jews. They are the husbandmen here described. Their sins are set before us here as in a picture. Of this there can be no doubt. It is written, that "He spoke about them."

But we must not flatter ourselves that this parable contains nothing for the Gentiles. There are lessons laid down for us, as well as for the Jew. Let us see what they are.

We see, in the first place, what distinguishing privileges God is pleased to bestow on some nations.

He chose Israel to be a peculiar people to Himself. He separated them from the other nations of the earth, and bestowed on them countless blessings. He gave them revelations of Himself, while all the rest of the earth was in darkness. He gave them the law, and the covenants, and the oracles of God, while all the world beside was let alone. In short, God dealt with the Jews as a man deals with a piece of land which he fences out and cultivates, while all the fields around are left untilled and waste. The vineyard of the Lord was the house of Israel. (Isaiah. 5:7.)

And have we no privileges? Beyond doubt we have many. We have the Bible, and liberty for every one to read it. We have the Gospel, and permission to everyone to hear it. We have spiritual mercies in abundance, of which five hundred millions of our fellow men know nothing at all. How thankful we ought to be! The poorest man in England may say every morning, "There are five hundred million immortal souls worse off than I am. Who am I, that I should differ? Bless the Lord, O my soul."

We see, in the next place, what a bad use nations sometimes make of their privileges.

When the Lord separated the Jews from other people, He had a right to expect that they would serve Him, and obey His laws. When a man has taken pains with a vineyard, he has a right to expect fruit. But Israel rendered not a due return for all God's mercies. They mingled with the heathen, and learned their ways. They hardened themselves in sin and unbelief. They turned aside after idols. They kept not God's ordinances. They despised God's temple. They refused to listen to His prophets. They abused those whom he sent to call them to repentance. And finally they brought their wickedness to a height, by killing the Son of God Himself, even Christ the Lord.

And what are we doing ourselves with our privileges? Truly that is a serious question, and one that ought to make us think. It may well be feared, that we are not, as a nation, living up to our light, or walking worthy of our many mercies. Must we not confess with shame, that millions among us seem utterly without God in the world? Must we not acknowledge, that in many a town, and in many

a village, Christ seems hardly to have any disciple, and the Bible seems hardly to be believed? It is vain to shut our eyes to these facts. The fruit that the Lord receives from His vineyard in Great Britain, compared with what it ought to be, is disgracefully small. It may well be doubted whether we are not as provoking to Him as the Jews.

We see, in the next place, what an dreadful reckoning God sometimes has with nations and churches, which make a bad use of their privileges.

A time came when the patience of God towards the Jews had an end. Forty years after our Lord's death, the cup of their iniquity was at length full, and they received a heavy chastisement for their many sins. Their holy city, Jerusalem, was destroyed. Their temple was burned. They themselves were scattered over the face of the earth. "The kingdom of God was taken from them, and given to a nation bringing forth its fruits."

And will the same thing ever happen to us? Will the judgments of God ever come down on this nation of England, because of her unfruitfulness under so many mercies? Who can tell? We may well cry with the prophet, "Lord God, you alone know." We only know that judgments have come on many a church and nation in the last 1800 years. The kingdom of God has been taken from the African churches. The Mohammedan power has overwhelmed most of the churches of the East. At all events it becomes all believers to intercede much on behalf of our country. Nothing offends God so much as neglect of privileges. Much has been given to us, and much will be required.

We see, in the last place, the power of conscience even in wicked men.

The chief priests and elders at last discovered that our Lord's parable was specially meant for themselves. The point of its closing words was too sharp to be escaped. "They knew that he spoke about them."

There are many hearers of the Gospel in every congregation, who are exactly in the condition of these unhappy men. They know that what they hear Sunday after Sunday is all true. They know that they are wrong themselves, and that every sermon condemns them. But they have neither will nor courage to acknowledge this. They are too proud and too fond of the world to confess their past mistakes, and to take up the cross and follow Christ. Let us all beware of this dreadful state of mind. The last day will prove that there was more going on in the consciences of hearers than was at all known to preachers. Thousands and ten thousands will be found, like the chief priests, to have been convicted by their own conscience, and yet to have died unconverted.

Chapter 22 (Chapters 22-23)

22-23. The rejected King clashes with the leaders

22:1-14. Parable of the marriage feast

MATTHEW 22:1-14

Jesus answered and spoke again in parables to them, saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come. Again he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "Behold, I have made ready my dinner. My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the marriage feast!"' But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise, and the rest grabbed his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. When the king heard that, he was angry, and sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited weren't worthy. Go therefore to the intersections of the highways, and as many as you may find, invite to the marriage feast.' Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who didn't have on wedding clothing, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not wearing wedding clothing?' He was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness; where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.' For many are called, but few chosen."

The parable related in these verses is one of very wide signification. In its first application it unquestionably points to the Jews. But we may not confine it to them. It contains heart-searching lessons for all among whom the Gospel is preached. It is a spiritual picture which speaks to us this day, if we have an ear to hear. The remark of Olshausen is wise and true, "parables are like many-sided precious stones, cut so as to cast lustre in more than one direction."

Let us observe, in the first place, that the salvation of the Gospel is compared to a marriage feast. The Lord Jesus tells us that "a certain king made a marriage feast for his son."

There is in the Gospel a complete provision for all the needs of man's soul. There is a supply of everything that can be required to relieve spiritual hunger

and spiritual thirst. Pardon, peace with God, lively hope in this world, glory in the world to come, are set before us in rich abundance. It is "a feast of fat things." All this provision is owing to the love of the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. He offers to take us into union with Himself--to restore us to the family of God as dear children--to clothe us with His own righteousness--to give us a place in His kingdom, and to present us faultless before His Father's throne at the last day. The Gospel, in short, is an offer of food to the hungry--joy to the mourner--a home to the outcast--a loving friend to the lost. It is glad tidings. God offers, through His dear Son, to be at peace with sinful man. Let us not forget this--"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10.)

Let us observe, in the second place, that the invitations of the Gospel are wide, full, broad, and unlimited. The Lord Jesus tells us in the parable, that the king's servants said to those who were bidden, "all things are ready. Come to the marriage feast!"

There is nothing lacking on God's part for the salvation of sinners' souls. No one will ever be able to say at last that it was God's fault, if he is not saved. The Father is ready to love and receive. The Son is ready to pardon and cleanse guilt away. The Spirit is ready to sanctify and renew. Angels are ready to rejoice over the returning sinner. Grace is ready to assist him. The Bible is ready to instruct him. Heaven is ready to be his everlasting home. One thing only is needful, and that is, the sinner must be ready and willing himself. Let this also never be forgotten. Let us not quibble and split hairs upon this point. God will be found clear of the blood of all lost souls. The Gospel always speaks of sinners as responsible and accountable beings. The Gospel places an open door before all mankind. No one is excluded from the range of its offers. Though efficient only to believers, those offers are sufficient for all the world. Though few enter the strait gate, all are invited to come in.

Let us observe, in the third place, that the salvation of the Gospel is rejected by many to whom it is offered. The Lord Jesus tells us, that those whom the king's servants invited to the wedding, "made light of it, and went their ways."

There are thousands of hearers of the Gospel who derive from it no benefit whatever. They listen to it Sunday after Sunday, and year after year, and do not believe to the saving of the soul. They feel no special need of the Gospel. They see no special beauty in it. They do not perhaps hate it, or oppose it, or scoff at it, but they do not receive it into their hearts. They like other things far better. Their money, their lands--their business, or their pleasures, are all far more interesting subjects to them than their souls. It is an dreadful state of mind to be

in, but awfully common. Let us search our own hearts, and take heed that it is not our own. Open sin may kill its thousands; but indifference and neglect of the Gospel kill their tens of thousands. Multitudes will find themselves in hell, not so much because they openly broke the Ten Commandments, as because they made light of the gospel. Christ died for them on the cross, but they neglected Him.

Let us observe, in the last place, that all false professors of religion will be detected, exposed, and eternally condemned at the last day. The Lord Jesus tells us, that when the wedding was at last furnished with guests, the king came in to see them, and "saw a man who didn't have on wedding-clothing." He asked him how he came in there without one, and he received no reply. And he then commanded the servants to "bind him hand and foot and take him away."

There will always be some false professors in the Church of Christ, as long as the world stands. In this parable, as Quesnel says, "One single castaway represents all the rest." It is impossible to read the hearts of men. Deceivers and hypocrites will never be entirely excluded from the ranks of those who call themselves Christians. So long as a man professes subjection to the Gospel, and lives an outwardly correct life, we dare not say positively that he is not clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

But there will be no deception at the last day. The unerring eye of God will discern who are His own people, and who are not. Nothing but true faith shall abide the fire of His judgment. All spurious Christianity shall be weighed in the balance and found lacking. None but true believers shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. It shall avail the hypocrite nothing that he has been a loud talker about religion, and had the reputation of being an eminent Christian among men. His triumphing shall be but for a moment. He shall be stripped of all his borrowed plumage, and stand naked and shivering before the bar of God, speechless, self-condemned, hopeless, and helpless. He shall be cast into outer darkness with shame, and reap according as he has sown. Well may our Lord say, "there shall be weeping and grinding of teeth."

Let us learn wisdom from the solemn pictures of this parable, and give diligence to make our calling and election sure. We ourselves are among those to whom the word is spoken, "All things are ready, come to the marriage feast." Let us see that we refuse not him that speaks. Let us not sleep as others do, but watch and be sober. Time hastens on. The King will soon come in to see the guests. Have we or have we not got on the wedding garment? Have we put on Christ? That is the grand question that arises out of this parable. May we never

rest until we can give a satisfactory answer! May those heart-searching words daily ring in our ears, "Many are called, but few are chosen!"

Verses 22:15-46. The doom pronounced and lament made over Jerusalem

MATTHEW 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and took counsel how they might entrap him in his talk. They sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are honest, and teach the way of God in truth, no matter who you teach, for you aren't partial to anyone. Tell us therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test me, you hypocrites? Show me the tax money."

They brought to him a denarius.

He asked them, "Whose is this image and inscription?"

They said to him, "Caesar's."

Then he said to them, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

When they heard it, they marveled, and left him, and went away.

We see in this passage the first of a series of subtle attacks, which were made on our Lord during the last days of His earthly ministry. His deadly foes, the Pharisees, saw the influence which He was obtaining, both by His miracles and by His preaching. They were determined by some means to silence Him, or put Him to death. They therefore endeavored to "entrap him in his talk." They sent forth "their disciples with the Herodians," to test Him with a hard question. They wished to entice Him into saying something which might serve as a handle for an accusation against Him. Their scheme, we are told in these verses, entirely failed. They took nothing by their movement, and retreated in confusion.

The first thing which demands our attention in these verses, is the flattering language with which our Lord was accosted by His enemies. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are honest, and teach the way of God in truth, no matter who you teach, for you aren't partial to anyone." How well these Pharisees and

Herodians talked! What smooth and honeyed words were these! They thought, no doubt, that by good words and fair speeches they would throw our Lord off His guard. It might truly be said of them, "his mouth was smooth as butter, but his heart was war. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords." (Psalm 55:21.)

It becomes all professing Christians to be much on their guard against FLATTERY. We mistake greatly if we suppose that persecution and hard usage are the only weapons in Satan's armoury. That crafty foe has other engines for doing us mischief, which he knows well how to work. He knows how to poison souls by the world's seductive kindness, when he cannot frighten them by the fiery dart and the sword. Let us not be ignorant of his devices. By peace he destroys many.

We are only too apt to forget this truth. We overlook the many examples which God has given us in Scripture for our learning. What brought about the ruin of Samson? Not the armies of the Philistines, but the pretended love of a Philistine woman. What led to Solomon's backsliding? Not the strength of outward enemies, but the blandishment of his numerous wives. What was the cause of king Hezekiah's greatest mistake? Not the sword of Sennacherib, or the threats of Rabshakeh, but the flattery of the Babylonian ambassadors. Let us remember these things, and be on our guard. Peace often ruins nations more than war. Sweet things occasion far more sicknesses than bitter. The sun makes the traveller cast off his protective garments far sooner than the north wind. Let us beware of the flatterer. Satan is never so dangerous as when he appears as an angel of light. The world is never so dangerous to the Christian as when it smiles. When Judas betrayed his Lord, it was with a kiss. The believer that is proof against the world's frown does well. But he that is proof against its flattery does better.

The second thing that demands our attention in these verses, is the marvellous wisdom of the reply which our Lord made to His enemies. The Pharisees and Herodians asked whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not. They doubtless thought, that they had put a question which our Lord could not answer without giving them an advantage. Had He simply replied that it was lawful to pay tribute, they would have denounced Him to the people as one who dishonoured the privileges of Israel, and considered the children of Abraham no longer free, but subjects to a foreign power. Had He, on the other hand, replied that it was not lawful to pay tribute, they would have denounced Him to the Romans as a mover of sedition, and a rebel against Caesar, who refused to pay his taxes. But our Lord's conduct completely baffled them. He demanded to see the tribute-money. He asks them whose head is on that coin. They reply,

Caesar's. They acknowledge that Caesar has some authority over them, by using money bearing his image and superscription, since he that coins the current money is ruler of the land where that money is current. And at once they receive an irresistibly conclusive answer to their question--"Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The principle laid down in these well-known words is one of deep importance. There is one obedience owing by every Christian to the civil government under which he lives, in all matters which are temporal, and not purely spiritual. He may not approve of every requirement of that civil government. But he must submit to the laws of the commonwealth, so long as those laws are unrepealed. He must "give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." There is another obedience which the Christian owes to the God of the Bible in all matters which are purely spiritual. No temporal loss, no civil disability, no displeasure of the powers that be, must ever tempt him to do things which the Scripture plainly forbids. His position may be very trying. He may have to suffer much for his conscience sake. But he must never fly in the face of unmistakable requirements of Scripture. If Caesar coins a new Gospel, he is not to be obeyed. We must "give to God the things that are God's."

The subject unquestionably is one of great difficulty and delicacy. It is certain that the church must not swallow up the state. It is no less certain that the state must not swallow up the church. On no point, perhaps, have conscientious men been so much tried. On no point have good men disagreed so much, as in solving the problem, "where the things of Caesar end, and the things of God begin." The civil power, on the one side, has often encroached terribly on the rights of conscience--as the English puritans found to their cost in the unhappy time of the Stuarts. The spiritual power, on the other side, has often pushed its claims to an extravagant extent, so as to take Caesar's scepter out of his hands--as it did when the church of Rome trampled on our own English king John. In order to have a right judgment in all questions of this kind, every true Christian should constantly pray for wisdom from above. The man whose eye is single, and who daily seeks for grace, and practical common sense, will never be allowed greatly to err.

MATTHEW 22:23-33

On that day Sadducees (those who say that there is no resurrection) came to him. They asked him, saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother.' Now there were with us seven brothers. The first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother. In like manner the second also, and the

third, to the seventh. After them all, the woman died. In the resurrection therefore, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they all had her."

But Jesus answered them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like God's angels in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, haven't you read that which was spoken to you by God, saying,'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

When the multitudes heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

This passage describes a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Sadducees. These unhappy men, who said that there was "no resurrection," attempted, like the Pharisees and Herodians, to perplex our Lord with hard questions. Like them, they hoped "to entangle Him in His talk," and to injure His reputation among the people. Like them, they were completely baffled.

Let us observe, in the first place, that absurd sceptical objections to Bible truths are ancient things. The Sadducees wished to show the absurdity of the doctrine of the resurrection and the life to come. They therefore came to our Lord with a story which was probably invented for the occasion. They told him that a certain woman had married seven brothers in succession, who had all died and left no children. They then asked "whose wife" this woman would be in the next world, when all rose again. The object of the question was plain and transparent. They meant, in reality, to bring the whole doctrine of a resurrection into contempt, They meant to insinuate, that there must needs be confusion, and strife, and unseemly disorder, if, after death, men and women were to live again.

It must never surprise us, if we meet with like objections against the doctrines of Scripture, and especially against those doctrines which concern another world. There never probably will be lacking "unreasonable men," who will "intrude" into things unseen, and make imaginary difficulties their excuse for unbelief. 'Supposed cases' are one of the favourite strongholds in which an unbelieving mind loves to entrench itself. Such a mind will often set up a shadow of its own imagining, and fight with it, as if it was a truth. Such a mind will often refuse to look at the overwhelming mass of plain evidence by which Christianity is supported, and will fasten down on some one single difficulty, which it fancies is unanswerable.

The talk and arguments of people of this character should never shake our faith for a moment. For one thing, we should remember that there must needs be

deep and dark things in a religion which comes from God, and that a child may put questions which the greatest philosopher cannot answer. For another thing, we should remember, that there are countless truths in the Bible, which are clear, and unmistakable. Let us first attend them, believe them, and obey them. So doing, we need not doubt that many a thing now unintelligible to us will yet be made plain. So doing, we may be sure that "what we know not now we shall know hereafter."

Let us observe, in the second place, what a remarkable text our Lord brings forward, in proof of the reality of a life to come. He places before the Sadducees the words which God spoke to Moses in the bush--"I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." (Exod. 3:6.) He adds the comment, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." At the time when Moses heard these words, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead and buried many years. Two centuries had passed away since Jacob, the last of the three, was carried to his tomb. And yet God spoke of them as being still His people, and of Himself as being still their God. He said not, "I was their God," but "I am."

Perhaps we are often tempted to doubt the truth of a resurrection, and a life to come. But, unhappily, it is easy to hold truths theoretically, and yet not realize them practically. There are few of us who would not find it good to meditate on the mighty verity which our Lord here unfolds, and to give it a prominent place in our thoughts. Let us settle it in our minds, that the dead are in one sense still alive. From our eyes they have passed away, and their place knows them no more. But in the eyes of God they live, and will one day come forth from their graves to receive an everlasting sentence. There is no such thing as annihilation. The idea is a miserable delusion. The sun, moon, and stars--the solid mountains, and deep sea, will one day come to nothing. But the weakest babe of the poorest man shall live for evermore, in another world. May we never forget this! Happy is he who can say from his heart the words of the Nicene Creed, "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."

Let us observe, in the last place, the account which our Lord gives of the state of men and women after the resurrection. He silences the fancied objections of the Sadducees, by showing that they entirely mistook the true character of the resurrection state. They took it for granted that it must needs be a gross, carnal existence, like that of mankind upon earth. Our Lord tells those who in the next world we may have a real material body, and yet a body of very different constitution, and different necessities, from that which we have now. He speaks only of the saved, be it remembered. He omits all mention of the lost. He says, "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

We know but little of the life to come in heaven. Perhaps our clearest ideas of it are drawn from considering what it will not be, rather than what it will be. It is a state in which we shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more. Sickness, pain, and disease, will not be known. Wasting, old age, and death will have no place. Marriages, births, and a constant succession of inhabitants, will be no more needed. They who are once admitted into heaven shall dwell there for evermore. And, to pass from negatives to positives, one thing we are told plainly--we shall be "as the angels of God." Like them, we shall serve God perfectly, unhesitatingly, and unweariedly. Like them, we shall ever be in God's presence. Like them, we shall ever delight to do His will. Like them, we shall give all glory to the Lamb. These are deep things. But they are all true.

Are we ready for this life? Would we enjoy it, if admitted to take part in it? Is the company of God, and the service of God pleasant to us now? Is the occupation of angels one in which we would delight? These are solemn questions. Our hearts must be heavenly on earth, while we live, if we hope to go to heaven when we rise again in another world. (Coloss. 3:1-4.)

MATTHEW 22:34-46

But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him."Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?"

Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?"

They said to him, "The son of David."

He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, 'the Lord said to my Lord, sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?' If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"

No one was able to answer him a word, neither did any man dare ask him any more questions from that day forth.

In the beginning of this passage we find our Lord replying to the question of a certain lawyer, who asked him which was "the greatest commandment of the

law?" That question was asked in no friendly spirit. But we have reason to be thankful that it was asked at all. It drew from our Lord an answer full of precious instruction. Thus we see how good may come out of evil.

Let us mark what an admirable summary these verses contain of our duty towards God and our neighbour. Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." He says again, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." And He adds, "The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

How simple are these two rules, and yet how comprehensive! How soon the words are repeated, and yet how much they contain! How humbling and condemning they are! How much they prove our daily need of mercy and the precious blood of atonement! Happy would it be for the world, if these rules were more known and more practiced!

Love is the grand secret of true obedience to GOD. When we feel towards Him as children feel towards a dear father, we shall delight to do His will. We shall not find His commandments grievous, and work for Him like slaves under fear of the lash. We shall take pleasure in trying to keep His laws, and mourn when we transgress them. None work so well as those who work out of love. The fear of punishment, or the desire of reward, are principles of far less power. They do the will of God best, who do it from the heart. Would we train children right? Let us teach them to love God.

Love is the grand secret of right behaviour towards our FELLOW MEN. He who loves his neighbour will scorn to do him any willful injury, either in person, property, or character. But he will not rest there. He will desire in every way to do him good. He will strive to promote his comfort and happiness in every way. He will endeavour to lighten his sorrows, and increase his joys. When a man loves us, we feel confidence in him. We know that he will never intentionally do us harm, and that in every time of need he will be our friend. Would we teach children to behave aright towards others? Let us teach them to love everybody as themselves, and do to others as they would have others do to them.

But how shall we obtain this love towards GOD? It is no natural feeling. We are born in sin, and, as sinners, are afraid of God. How then can we love Him? We can never really love Him until we are at peace with Him through Christ. When we feel our sins forgiven, and ourselves reconciled to our holy Maker, then, and not until then, we shall love Him and have the spirit of adoption. Faith in Christ is the true spring of love to God. They love most who feel most forgiven. "We love him because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19.)

And how shall we obtain this love towards our NEIGHBOUR? This is also no natural feeling. We are born selfish, hateful, and hating one another. (Titus 3:3.) We shall never love our fellow man aright until our hearts are changed by the Holy Spirit. We must be born again. We must put off the old man, and put on the new, and receive the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Then, and not until then, our cold hearts will know true God-like love towards all. "The fruit of the Spirit is love." (Galat. 5:22.)

Let these things sink down into our hearts. There is much vague talk in these latter days about love and charity. Men profess to admire them and desire to see them increased, and yet hate the principles which alone can produce them. Let us stand fast in the old paths. We cannot have fruits and flowers without roots. We cannot have love to God and man without faith in Christ, and without regeneration. The way to spread true love in the world, is to teach the atonement of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The concluding portion of the passage, contains a question put to the Pharisees by our Lord. After answering with perfect wisdom the inquiries of His adversaries, He at last asks them, "What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They reply at once, "the son of David." He then asks them to explain, why David in the book of Psalms calls Him Lord. (Psalm. 110:1.) "If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?" At once His enemies were put to silence. "No one was able to answer him a word." The Scribes and Pharisees no doubt were familiar with the Psalm He quoted, but they could not explain its application. It could only be explained by conceding the pre-existence and divinity of the Messiah. This the Pharisees would not concede. Their only idea of Messiah was, that He was to be a man like one of themselves. Their ignorance of the Scriptures, of which they pretended to know more than others, and their low, carnal view of the true nature of Christ, were thus exposed at one and the same time. Well may Matthew say, by the Holy Spirit, "neither did any man dare ask him any more questions from that day forth!"

Let us not leave these verses without making a practical use of our Lord's solemn question, "What do you think of Christ?" What do we think of His person, and His offices? What do we think of His life, and what of His death for us on the cross? What do we think of His resurrection, ascension, and intercession at the right hand of God? Have we tasted that He is gracious? Have we laid hold on Him by faith? Have we found by experience that He is precious to our souls? Can we truly say He is my Redeemer, and my Saviour, my Shepherd, and my Friend?

These are serious inquiries. May we never rest until we can give a satisfactory answer to them. It will not profit us to read about Christ, if we are not joined to Him by living faith. Once more then let us test our religion by this question; "What do we think of Christ?"



Jerusalem from Mount of Olives

Chapter 23

23:1-39. The doom pronounced and lament made over Jerusalem

MATTHEW 23:1-12

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. All things therefore they tell you to observe; observe and do, but don't do their works; for they say, and don't do. For they bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad, enlarge the fringes of their garments, and love the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi, Rabbi' by men. But don't you be called 'Rabbi,' for one is your teacher--the Christ, and all of you are brothers. Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, he who is in heaven. Neither be called masters,

for one is your master, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you will be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

We are now beginning a chapter which in one respect is the most remarkable in the four Gospels. It contains the last words which the Lord Jesus ever spoke within the walls of the temple. Those last words consist of a withering exposure of the Scribes and Pharisees, and a sharp rebuke of their doctrines and practices. Knowing full well that His time on earth was drawing to a close, our Lord no longer keeps back his opinion of the leading teachers of the Jews. Knowing that He would soon leave His followers alone, like sheep among wolves, He warns them plainly against the false shepherds, by whom they were surrounded.

The whole chapter is a signal example of boldness and faithfulness in denouncing error. It is a striking proof that it is possible for the most loving heart to use the language of stern reproof. Above all it is an dreadful evidence of the guilt of unfaithful teachers. So long as the world stands, this chapter ought to be a warning and a beacon to all ministers of religion. No sins are so sinful as theirs in the sight of Christ.

In the twelve verses which begin the chapter, we see firstly, the duty of distinguishing between the office of a false teacher and his example. "The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat." Rightly or wrongly, they occupied the position of the chief public teachers of religion among the Jews. However unworthily they filled the place of authority, their office entitled them to respect. But while their office was respected, their bad lives were not to be copied. And although their teaching was to be adhered to, so long as it was Scriptural, it was not to be observed when it contradicted the Word of God. To use the words of Brentius, "They were to be heard when they taught what Moses taught," but no longer. That such was our Lord's meaning is evident from the whole tenor of the chapter we are reading. False doctrine is there denounced as well as false practice.

The duty here placed before us is one of great importance. There is a constant tendency in the human mind to run into extremes. If we do not regard the office of the minister with idolatrous veneration, we are apt to treat it with improper contempt. Against both these extremes we have need to be on our guard. However much we may disapprove of a minister's practice, or dissent from his teaching, we must never forget to respect his office. We must show that we can honor the commission, whatever we may think of the offices that holds it. The example of Paul on a certain occasion is worthy of notice, "I didn't know,

brothers, that he was high priest. For it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" (Acts 23:5.)

We see secondly, in these verses, that inconsistency, ostentation, and love of pre-eminence, among professors of religion, are specially displeasing to Christ. As to INCONSISTENCY it is remarkable that the very first thing our Lord says of the Pharisees is, that "they say, and do not." They required from others what they did not practice themselves. As to OSTENTATION, our Lord declares that they did all their works "to be seen of men." They had their phylacteries, or strips of parchment, with texts written on them, which many Jews wore on their clothes, made of an excessive size. They had the "borders," or fringes of their garments, which Moses instructed the Israelites to wear as a remembrance of God, made of an extravagant width. (Num. 15:38.) And all this was done to attract notice, and to make people think how holy they were. As to LOVE OF PRE-EMINENCE, our Lord tells us that the Pharisees loved to have "the chief seats" given them in public places, and to have flattering titles addressed to them. All these things our Lord holds up to reprobation. Against all He would have us watch and pray. They are soul-ruining sins. "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another?" (John 5:44.) Happy would it have been for the Church of Christ, if this passage had been more deeply pondered, and the spirit of it more implicitly obeyed. The Pharisees are not the only people who have imposed austerities on others, and affected a sanctity of apparel, and loved the praise of man. The annals of Church history show that only too many Christians have walked closely in their steps. May we remember this and be wise! It is perfectly possible for a baptized Englishman to be in spirit a thorough Pharisee.

We see in the third place, from these verses, that Christians must never give to any man the titles and honours which are due to God alone and to His Christ. We are to "call no man Father on earth."

The rule here laid down must be interpreted with proper Scriptural qualification. We are not forbidden to esteem ministers very highly in love for their work's sake. (1 Thess. 5:13.) Even Paul, one of the humblest saints, called Titus "his own son in the faith," and says to the Corinthians, "I have begotten you through the gospel." (1 Cor. 4:15.) But still we must be very careful that we do not insensibly give to ministers a place and an honor which do not belong to them. We must never allow them to come between ourselves and Christ. The very best are not infallible. They are not priests who can atone for us. They are not mediators who can undertake to manage our soul's affairs with God. They are men of like passions with ourselves, needing the same cleansing blood, and the same renewing Spirit, set apart to a high and holy calling, but still after all, only men. Let us never forget these things. Such cautions are always useful.

Human nature would always rather lean on a visible minister, than an invisible Christ.

We see in the last place, that there is no grace which should distinguish the Christian so much as humility. He that would be great in the eyes of Christ, must aim at a totally different mark from that of the Pharisees. His aim must be, not so much to rule, as to serve the Church. Well says Baxter, "church greatness consists in being greatly serviceable." The desire of the Pharisee was to receive honor, and to be called "master." The desire of the Christian must be to do good, and to give himself, and all that he has to the service of others. Truly this is a high standard, but a lower one must never content us. The example of our blessed Lord, the direct command of the apostolic Epistles, both alike require us to be "clothed with humility." (1 Peter 5:5.) Let us seek that blessed grace day by day. No grace is so beautiful, however much despised by the world. No grace is such an evidence of saving faith, and true conversion to God. No grace is so often commended by our Lord. Of all His sayings, hardly any is so often repeated as that which concludes the passage we have now read, "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

MATTHEW 23:13-33

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and as a pretence you make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you don't enter in yourselves, neither do you allow those who are entering in to enter. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel around by sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much of a son of Gehenna as yourselves.

"Woe to you, you blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.' You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obligated?' You blind fools! For which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift? He therefore who swears by the altar, swears by it, and by everything on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it, and by him who was living in it. He who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits on it.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law--justice, mercy, and faith. But you ought to have done these, and not to have left the other undone. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel!

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and unrighteousness. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside of it may become clean also.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitened tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and decorate the tombs of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' Therefore you testify to yourselves that you are children of those who killed the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Hell?"

We have in these verses the charges of our Lord against the Jewish teachers ranged under eight heads. Standing in the midst of the temple, with a listening crowd around Him, He publicly denounces the main errors of the Scribes and Pharisees in unsparing terms. Eight times He uses the solemn expression, "woe to you." Seven times He calls them "hypocrites." Twice He speaks of them as "blind guides"--twice as "fools and blind"--once to "serpents and a brood of vipers." Let us mark that language well. It teaches a solemn lesson. It shows how utterly abominable the spirit of the Scribes and Pharisees is in God's sight, in whatever form it may be found.

Let us glance shortly at the eight charges which our Lord brings forward, and then seek to draw from the whole passage some general instruction.

The first "woe" in the list is directed against the systematic opposition of the Scribes and Pharisees to the progress of the Gospel. They "shut up the kingdom of heaven." They would neither go in themselves, nor allow others to go in. They rejected the warning voice of John the Baptist. They refused to acknowledge Jesus, when He appeared among them, as the Messiah. They tried to keep back Jewish inquirers. They would not believe the Gospel themselves,

and they did all in their power to prevent others believing it. This was a great sin.

The second "woe" in the list is directed against the covetousness and self-aggrandizing spirit of the Scribes and Pharisees. They "devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers." They imposed on the credulity of weak and unprotected women, by an affectation of great devoutness, until they were regarded as their spiritual directors. They scrupled not to abuse the influence thus unrighteously obtained, to their own temporal advantage, and in a word to make money by their religion. This again was a great sin.

The third "woe" in the list is directed against the zeal of the Scribes and Pharisees for making adherents. They "compassed sea and land to make one proselyte." They laboured incessantly to make men join their party and adopt their opinions. They did this from no desire to benefit men's souls in the least, or to bring them to God. They only did it to swell the ranks of their sect, and to increase the number of their adherents, and their own importance. Their religious zeal arose from sectarianism, and not from the love of God. This also was a great sin.

The fourth "woe" in the list is directed against the doctrines of the Scribes and Pharisees about oaths. They drew subtle distinctions between one kind of oath and another. They taught the Jesuitical tenet, that some oaths were binding on men, while others were not. They attached greater importance to oaths sworn "by the gold" offered to the temple, than to oaths sworn "by the temple" itself. By so doing they brought the third commandment into contempt--and by making men overrate the value of alms and oblations, advanced their own interests. This again was a great sin.

The fifth "woe" in the list is directed against the practice of the Scribes and Pharisees, to exalt trifles in religion above serious things, to put the last things first, and the first last. They made great ado about tithing "mint," and other garden herbs, as if they could not be too strict in their obedience to God's law. And yet at the same time they neglected great plain duties, such as justice, charity, and honesty. This again was a great sin.

The sixth and seventh "woes" in the list possess too much in common to be divided. They are directed against a general characteristic of the religion of the Scribes. They set outward decency above inward sanctification and purity of heart. They made it a religious duty to cleanse the "outside" of their cups and platters, but neglected their own inward man. They were like whitened sepulchres, clean and beautiful externally, but within full of all corruption.

"Even so they outwardly appeared righteous to men, but inwardly were full of hypocrisy and iniquity." This also was a great sin.

The last "woe" in the list is directed against the affected veneration of the Scribes and Pharisees for the memory of dead saints. They built the "tombs of the prophets," and garnished "the sepulchres of the righteous." And yet their own lives proved that they were of one mind with those who "killed the prophets." Their own conduct was a daily evidence that they liked dead saints better than living ones. The very men that pretended to honor dead prophets, could see no beauty in a living Christ. This also was a great sin.

Such is the melancholy picture which our Lord gives of Jewish teachers. Let us turn from the contemplation of it with sorrow and humiliation. It is a fearful exhibition of the morbid anatomy of human nature. It is a picture which unhappily has been reproduced over and over again in the history of the Church of Christ. There is not a point in the character of the Scribes and Pharisees in which it might not be easily shown, that people calling themselves Christians have often walked in their steps.

Let us learn from the whole passage how deplorable was the condition of the Jewish nation when our Lord was upon earth. When such were the teachers, what must have been the miserable darkness of those who were taught by them! Truly the iniquity of Israel had come to the full. It was high time indeed for the Sun of Righteousness to arise and the Gospel to be preached.

Let us learn from the whole passage how abominable is hypocrisy in the sight of God. These Scribes and Pharisees are not charged with being thieves or murderers, but with being hypocrites to the very core. Whatever we are in our religion, let us resolve never to wear a cloak. Let us by all means be honest and real.

Let us learn from the whole passage how awfully dangerous is the position of an unfaithful minister. It is bad enough to be blind ourselves. It is a thousand times worse to be a blind guide. Of all men none is so culpably wicked as an unconverted minister, and none will be judged so severely. It is a solemn saying about such a one, "He resembles an unskilful pilot--he does not perish alone."

Finally, let us beware of supposing from this passage, that the safest course in religion is to make no profession at all. This is to run into a dangerous extreme. It does not follow that there is no such thing as true profession, because some men are hypocrites. It does not follow that all money is bad, because there is much counterfeit coin. Let not hypocrisy prevent our confessing Christ, or

move us from our steadfastness, if we have confessed Him. Let us press on, looking unto Jesus, and resting on Him, praying daily to be kept from error, and saying with David, "let my heart be blameless toward your decrees." (Psalm 119:80.)

MATTHEW 23:34-39

"Therefore, behold, I send to you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city; that on you may come all the righteous bloodshed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar. Most certainly I tell you, all these things will come upon this generation.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me from now on, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

These verses form the conclusion of our Lord Jesus Christ's address, on the subject of the Scribes and Pharisees. They are the last words which He ever spoke, as a public teacher, in the hearing of the people. The characteristic tenderness and compassion of our Lord, shine forth in a striking manner at the close of His ministry. Though He left His enemies in unbelief, He shows that He loved and pitied them to the last.

We learn, in the first place, from these verses, that God often takes great pains with ungodly men. He sent the Jews "prophets and wise men and scribes." He gave them repeated warnings. He sent them message after message. He did not allow them to go on sinning without rebuke. They could never say that they were not told when they did wrong.

This is the way in which God generally deals with the unconverted. He does not cut them off in their sins without a call to repentance. He knocks at the door of their hearts by sicknesses and afflictions. He assails their consciences by sermons, or by the advice of friends. He summons them to consider their ways by opening the grave under their eyes, and taking away from them their idols. They often know not what it all means. They are often blind and deaf to all His gracious messages. But they will see His hand at last, though perhaps too late. They will find that "God spoke once, yes twice, though man paid no attention." (Job 33:14) They will discover that they too, like the Jews, had prophets, and

wise men, and Scribes sent to them. There was a voice in every providence, "Turn, turn, why will you die?" (Ezek 33:11.)

We learn, in the second place, from these verses, that God takes notice of the treatment which His messengers and ministers receive, and will one day reckon for it. The Jews, as a nation, had often given the servants of God most shameful usage. They had often dealt with them as enemies, because they told them the truth. Some they had persecuted, and some they had scourged, and some they had even killed. They thought perhaps that no account would be required of their conduct. But our Lord tells them they were mistaken. There was an eye that saw all their doings. There was a hand that registered all the innocent blood they shed, in books of everlasting remembrance. The dying words of Zacharias, who was "slain between the temple and the altar," would be found after eight hundred and fifty years, not to have fallen to the ground. He said, as he died, "the Lord look upon it and require it." (2 Chron. 24:22.)

Yet a few years, and there would be such an inquisition for blood at Jerusalem as the world had never seen. The holy city would be destroyed. The nation which had murdered so many prophets would itself be wasted by famine, pestilence, and the sword. And even those that escaped would be scattered to the four winds, and become, like Cain the murderer, "fugitives and vagabonds upon earth." We all know how literally these sayings were fulfilled. Well might our Lord say, "Most certainly all these things will come upon this generation."

It is good for us all to mark this lesson well. We are too apt to think that "bygones are bygones," and that things which to us are past, and done, and old, will never be raked up again. But we forget that with God "one day is as a thousand years" and that the events of a thousand years ago are as fresh in His sight, as the events of this very hour. God "requires that which is past," and above all, God will require an account of the treatment of His saints. The blood of the primitive Christians shed by the Roman Emperors--the blood of the Vallenses and Albigenses, and the sufferers at the massacre of Bartholomew--the blood of the martyrs who were burned at the time of the Reformation, and of those who have been put to death by the Inquisition--all, all will yet be accounted for. It is an old saying, that "the mill-stones of God's justice grind slowly, but they grind very fine." The world will yet see that "there is a God who judges the earth." (Psalm 58:11.)

Let those who persecute God's people in the present day take heed what they are doing. Let them know that all who injure, or ridicule, or mock, or slander others on account of their religion, commit a great sin. Let them know that Christ takes notice of every one who persecutes his neighbor because he is better

than himself, or because he prays, reads his Bible, and thinks about his soul. He lives who said, "he that touches you, touches the apple of my eye." (Zech 2:8.) The judgment day will prove that the King of kings will reckon with all who insult His servants.

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, that those who are lost forever, are lost through their own fault.

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ are very remarkable. He says, "I would have gathered your children together--and YOU would not."

There is something peculiarly deserving of notice in this expression. It throws light on a mysterious subject, and one which is often darkened by human explanations. It shows that Christ has feelings of pity and mercy for many who are not saved, and that the grand secret of man's ruin is his lack of will. Impotent as man is by nature--unable to think a good thought of himself--without power to turn himself to faith and calling upon God, he still appears to have a mighty ability to ruin his own soul. Powerless as he is to good, he is still powerful to evil. We say rightly that a man can do nothing of himself, but we must always remember that the seat of impotence is his WILL. A will to repent and believe no man can give himself, but a will to reject Christ and have his own way, every man possesses by nature, and if not saved at last, that will shall prove to have been his destruction. "You will not come to me," says Christ, "that you might have life." (John 5:40.)

Let us leave the subject with the comfortable reflection, that with Christ nothing is impossible. The hardest heart can be made willing in the day of His power. Beyond doubt, Grace is irresistible. But never let us forget, that the Bible speaks of man as a responsible being, and that it says of some, "you always resist the Holy Spirit." (Acts 7:51.) Let us understand that the ruin of those who are lost, is not because Christ was not willing to save them--nor yet because they wanted to be saved, but could not--but because they would not come to Christ. Let the ground we take up be always that of the passage we are now considering--Christ would gather men, but they will not to be gathered; Christ would save men, but they will not to be saved. Let it be a settled principle in our religion, that men's salvation, if saved, is wholly of God; and that man's ruin, if lost, is wholly of himself. The evil that is in us is all our own. The good, if we have any, is all of God. The saved in the next world will give God all the glory. The lost in the next world will find that they have destroyed themselves. (Hosea 13:9.)

Chapter 24

24-25. The rejected King’s Olivet Discourse

24:1-3. Prophecy of the destruction of the temple

MATTHEW 24:1-14

Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way. His disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "Don't you see all of these things? Most certainly I tell you, there will not be left here one stone on another, that will not be thrown down."

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Jesus answered them, "Be careful that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will lead many astray. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you aren't troubled, for all this must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines, plagues, and earthquakes in various places. But all these things are the beginning of birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to oppression, and will kill you. You will be hated by all of the nations for my name's sake. Then many will stumble, and will deliver up one another, and will hate one another. Many false prophets will arise, and will lead many astray. Because iniquity will be multiplied, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end, the same will be saved. This Good News of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

These verses begin a chapter full of prophecy--prophecy of which a large portion is unfulfilled--prophecy which ought to be deeply interesting to all true Christians. It is a subject to which the Holy Spirit says, we "do well to take heed." (2 Peter 1:19.)

All portions of Scripture like this, ought to be approached with deep humility, and earnest prayer for the teaching of the Spirit. On no point have good men so entirely disagreed as on the interpretation of prophecy. On no point have the prejudices of one class, the dogmatism of a second, and the extravagance of a third, done so much to rob the church of truths, which God intended to be a blessing. Well says Olshausen, "What does not man see, or fail to see, when it serves to establish his own favorite opinions?"

To understand the drift of the whole chapter, we must carefully keep in view the question which gave rise to our Lord's discourse. On leaving the temple for the last time, the disciples, with the natural feeling of Jews, had called their Master's attention to the splendid buildings of which it was composed. To their surprise and amazement, He tells them that the whole was about to be destroyed. These words appear to have sunk deeply into the minds of the disciples. They came to Him, as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, and asked Him with evident anxiety, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?"--In these words we see the clue to the subject of the prophecy now before us. It embraces three points--one, the destruction of Jerusalem--another, the second personal advent of Christ--and a third, the end of the world. These three points are undoubtedly in some parts of the chapter so entwined together, that it is difficult to separate and disentangle them. But all these points appear distinctly in the chapter, and without them it cannot be fairly explained.

The first fourteen verses of the prophecy are taken up with general lessons of wide range and application. They seem to apply with equal force to the close of both Jewish and Christian dispensations, the one event being strikingly typical of the other. They certainly demand special notice from us, on whom the latter ends of the world are come. Let us now see what those lessons are.

The first general lesson before us, is a warning against deception. The very first words of the discourse are, "Be careful that no one leads you astray."

A more needful warning than this cannot be conceived. Satan knows well the value of prophecy, and has ever labored to bring the subject into contempt. How many false Christs and false prophets arose before the destruction of Jerusalem, the works of Josephus abundantly prove. In how many ways the eyes of man are continually blinded in the present day, as to things to come, it might easily be shown. Irvingism and Mormonism have been only too successfully used as arguments for rejecting the whole doctrine of the second advent of Christ. Let us watch, and be on our guard.

Let no man deceive us as to the leading facts of unfulfilled prophecy, by telling us they are impossible--or as to the manner in which they will be brought to pass, by telling us it is improbable and contrary to past experience. Let no man deceive us as to the time when unfulfilled prophecies will be accomplished, either by fixing dates on the one hand, or bidding us wait for the conversion of the world on the other. On all these points let the plain meaning of Scripture be our only guide, and not the traditional interpretations of men. Let us not be ashamed to say that we expect a literal fulfilment of unfulfilled prophecy. Let us

frankly allow that there are many things we do not understand, but still hold our ground tenaciously, believe much--wait long, and not doubt that all will one day be made clear. Above all, let us remember that the first coming of Messiah to suffer, was the most improbable event that could have been conceived, and let us not doubt that as He literally came in person to suffer, so He will literally come again in person to reign.

The second grand lesson before us, is a warning against over-optimistic and extravagant expectations as to things which are to happen before the end comes. It is a warning as deeply important as the preceding one. Happy would it have been for the Church, if it had not been so much neglected.

We are not to expect a reign of universal peace, happiness, and prosperity, before the end comes. If we do, we shall be greatly deceived. Our Lord bids us look for "wars, famines, pestilence," and persecution. It is vain to expect peace until the Prince of Peace returns. Then, and not until then, the swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and nations learn war no more. Then, and not until then, the earth shall bring forth her increase. (Isaiah, 2:4 Psalm. 68:6.)

We are not to expect a time of universal purity of doctrine and practice in the Church of Christ, before the end comes. If we do, we shall be greatly mistaken. Our Lord bids us look for the rising of "false prophets," the "abounding of iniquity," and the "waxing cold of the love of many." The truth will never be received by all professing Christians, and holiness be the rule among men, until the great Head of the Church returns, and Satan is bound. Then, and not until then, there will be a glorious Church, without spot or blemish. (Ephes. 5:27.)

We are not to expect that all the world will be converted before the end comes. If we do, we shall be greatly mistaken. "The Gospel is to be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations," but we must not think that we shall see it universally believed. It will "take out a people," wherever it is faithfully preached, as witnesses to Christ, but the full gathering of the nations shall never take place until Christ comes. Then, and not until then, shall the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Acts 15:14; Habak. 2:14.)

Let us lay these things to heart, and remember them well. They are eminently truths for the present times. Let us learn to be moderate in our expectations from any existing machinery in the Church of Christ, and we shall be spared much disappointment. Let us make haste to spread the Gospel in the world, for the time is short, not long. The night comes when no man can work. Troublous times are ahead. Heresies and persecutions may soon weaken and

distract the churches. A fierce war of principles may soon convulse the nations. The doors now open to do good may soon be shut forever. Our eyes may yet see the sun of Christianity go down like the sun of Judaism, in clouds and storms. Above all, let us long for our Lord's return. Oh! for a heart to pray daily, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

24:4-26. Events of the Tribulation

MATTHEW 24:15-28

"When, therefore, you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take out things that are in his house. Let him who is in the field not return back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are with child and to nursing mothers in those days! Pray that your flight will not be in the winter, nor on a Sabbath, for then there will be great oppression, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever will be. Unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved. But for the sake of the chosen ones, those days will be shortened.

"Then if any man tells you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or, 'There,' don't believe it. For there will arise false christs, and false prophets, and they will show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen ones.

"Behold, I have told you beforehand. If therefore they tell you, 'Behold, he is in the wilderness,' don't go out; 'Behold, he is in the inner chambers,' don't believe it. For as the lightning flashes from the east, and is seen even to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For wherever the carcass is, there is where the vultures gather together.

One main subject of this part of our Lord's prophecy, is the taking of Jerusalem by the Romans. That great event took place about forty years after the words we have now read were spoken. A full account of it is to be found in the writings of the historian Josephus. Those writings are the best comment on our Lord's words. They are a striking proof of the accuracy of every tittle of His predictions. The horrors and miseries which the Jews endured throughout the siege of their city exceed anything on record. It was truly a time of "oppression, such as has not been since the beginning of the world." It surprises some to find so much importance attached to the taking of Jerusalem. They would rather regard the whole chapter as unfulfilled.

Such people forget that Jerusalem and the temple were the heart of the old Jewish dispensation. When they were destroyed, the old Mosaic system came to an end. The daily sacrifice, the yearly feasts, the altar, the holy of holies, the priesthood, were all essential parts of revealed religion, until Christ came, but no longer. When He died upon the cross, their work was done. They were dead, and it only remained that they should be buried. But it was not fitting that this thing should be done quietly. The ending of a dispensation given with so much solemnity at Mount Sinai, might well be expected to be marked with peculiar solemnity. The destruction of the holy temple, where so many old saints had seen "shadows of good things to come," might well be expected to form a subject of prophecy. And so it was. The Lord Jesus specially predicts the desolation of "the holy place." The great High Priest describes the end of the dispensation which had been a schoolmaster to bring men to Himself.

But we must not suppose that this part of our Lord's prophecy is exhausted by the first taking of Jerusalem. It is more than probable that our Lord's words have a further and deeper application still. It is more than probable that they apply to a second siege of Jerusalem, which is yet to take place, when Israel has returned to their own land--and to a second tribulation on the inhabitants thereof, which shall only be stopped by the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such a view of this passage may sound startling to some. But those who doubt its correctness would do well to study the last chapter of the prophet Zechariah, and the last chapter of Daniel. These two chapters contain solemn things. They throw great light on the verses we are now reading, and their connection with the verses which immediately follow.

It now remains for us to consider the lessons which this passage contains for our own personal edification. These lessons are plain and unmistakable. In them at least there is no darkness at all.

For one thing, we see that flight from danger may sometimes be the positive duty of a Christian. Our Lord Himself commanded his people under certain circumstances "to flee."

The servant of Christ undoubtedly is not to be a coward. He is to confess his master before men. He is to be willing to die, if needful, for the truth. But the servant of Christ is not required to run into danger, unless it comes in the line of duty. He is not to be ashamed to use reasonable means to provide for his personal safety, when no good is to be done by dying at his post. There is deep wisdom in this lesson. The true martyrs are not always those who court death, and are in a hurry to be beheaded or burned. There are times when it shows more grace to be quiet, and wait, and pray, and watch for opportunities, than to

defy our adversaries, and rush into the battle. May we have wisdom to know how to act in time of persecution! It is possible to be rash, as well as to be a coward--and to stop our own usefulness by being over hot, as well as by being over cold.

We see, for another thing, that in delivering this prophecy, our Lord makes special mention of the Sabbath. "Pray," he says, "that your flight be not on the Sabbath day."

This is a fact that deserves special notice. We live in times when the obligation of the Sabbath upon Christians is frequently denied by good men. They tell us that it is no more binding on us than the ceremonial law. It is difficult to see how such a view can be reconciled with our Lord's words on this solemn occasion. He seems intentionally to mention the Sabbath, when He is foretelling the final destruction of the temple and the Mosaic ceremonies, as if to mark the day with honour. He seems to hint that, although His people would be absolved from the yoke of sacrifices and ordinances, there would yet remain the keeping of a Sabbath for them. (Heb. 4:9.) The friends of a holy Sunday ought carefully to remember this text. It is one which will bear much weight.

We see for another thing, that God's elect are always special objects of God's care. Twice in this passage our Lord mentions them. "For the elect's sake the days of tribulation are to be shortened." It will not be possible to deceive the "elect."

Those whom God has chosen to salvation by Christ, are those whom God specially loves in this world. They are the jewels among mankind. He cares more for them than for kings on their thrones, if kings are not converted. He hears their prayers. He orders all the events of nations and the issues of wars for their good, and their sanctification. He keeps them by His Spirit. He allows neither man nor devil to pluck them out of His hand. Whatever tribulation comes on the world, God's elect are safe. May we never rest until we know that we are of this blessed number! There breathes not the man or woman who can prove that he is not one. The promises of the Gospel are open to all. May we give diligence to make our calling and election sure! God's elect are a people who cry unto Him night and day. When Paul saw the faith, and hope, and love of the Thessalonians, then he knew "their election of God." (1 Thess. 1:4; Luke 18:7.)

Finally, we see from these verses, that whenever the second advent of Christ takes place, it will be a very SUDDEN event. It will be "as the lightning flashes from the east, and is seen even to the west."

This is a practical truth that we should ever keep before our minds. That our Lord Jesus will come again in person to this world, we know from Scripture. That He will come in a time of great tribulation, we also know. But the precise period, the year, the month, the day, the hour, are all hidden things. We only know that it will be a very sudden event. Our plain duty then is to live always prepared for His return. Let us walk by faith, and not by sight. Let us believe in Christ, serve Christ, follow Christ, and love Christ. So living, whenever Christ may return, we shall be ready to meet Him.

24: 27-30. Second coming of Messiah

24:31. Regathering of Israel

24:32-36. The certainty of Messiah's coming

MATTHEW 24:29-35

But immediately after the oppression of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect ones from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

"Now from the fig tree learn this parable. When its branch has now become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that the summer is near. Even so you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Most certainly I tell you, this generation will not pass away, until all these things are accomplished. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

In this part of our Lord's prophecy, He describes His own second coming, to judge the world. This, at all events, seems the natural meaning of the passage. To take any lower view appears to be a violent straining of Scripture language. If the solemn words here used mean nothing more than the coming of the Roman armies to Jerusalem, we may explain away anything in the Bible. The event here described is one of far greater moment than the march of any earthly army. It is nothing less than the closing act of this dispensation, the second personal advent of Jesus Christ.

These verses teach us, in the first place, that when the Lord Jesus returns to this world, He shall come with peculiar glory and majesty. He shall come "in the

clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Before His presence the very sun, moon, and stars shall be darkened, and "the powers of heaven shall be shaken."

The SECOND personal coming of Christ shall be as different as possible from the FIRST. He came the first time as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was born in the manger of Bethlehem, in lowliness and humiliation. He took on him the form of a servant, and was despised and rejected of men. He was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, condemned by an unjust judgment, mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns, and at last crucified between two thieves. He shall come the second time as the King of all the earth, with all royal majesty. The princes and great men of this world shall themselves stand before His throne to receive an eternal sentence. Before him every mouth shall be stopped, and every knee bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. May we all remember this. Whatever ungodly men may do now, there will be no scoffing, no jesting at Christ, no infidelity at the last day. The servants of Jesus may well wait patiently. Their master shall one day be acknowledged King of kings by all the world.

These verses teach us, in the second place, that when Christ returns to this world, He will first take care of His believing people. He shall "send his angels," and "gather together his elect."

In the day of judgment true Christians shall be perfectly safe. Not a hair of their heads shall fall to the ground. Not one bone of Christ's mystical body shall be broken. There was an ark for Noah, in the day of the flood. There was a Zoar for Lot, when Sodom was destroyed. There shall be a hiding-place for all believers in Jesus, when the wrath of God at last bursts on this wicked world. Those mighty angels who rejoiced in heaven when each sinner repented, shall gladly catch up the people of Christ to meet their Lord in the air. That day no doubt will be a dreadful day, but believers may look forward to it without fear.

In the Day of Judgment true Christians shall at length be gathered together. The saints of every age, and every tongue shall be assembled out of every land. All shall be there, from righteous Abel down to the last soul that is converted to God--from the oldest patriarch down to the little infant that just breathed and died. Let us think what a happy gathering that will be, when all the family of God are at length together. If it has been pleasant to meet one or two saints occasionally on earth, how much more pleasant will it be to meet a "multitude that no man can number!" Surely we may be content to carry the cross, and put up with partings for a few years. We travel on towards a day, when we shall meet to part no more.

These verses teach us, in the third place, that until Christ returns to this earth, the Jews will always remain a separate people. Our Lord tells us, "This generation shall not pass away, until all these things are fulfilled."

The continued existence of the Jews as a distinct nation, is undeniably a great miracle. It is one of those evidences of the truth of the Bible which the infidel can never overthrow. Without a land, without a king, without a government, scattered and dispersed over the world for eighteen hundred years, the Jews are never absorbed among the people of the countries where they live, like Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Germans, but "dwell alone." Nothing can account for this but the finger of God. The Jewish nation stands before the world, a crushing answer to infidelity, and a living book of evidence that the Bible is true. But we ought not to regard the Jews only as witnesses of the truth of Scripture. We should see in them a continual pledge, that the Lord Jesus is coming again one day. Like the sacrament of the Lord's supper, they witness to the reality of the second advent, as well as of the first. Let us remember this. Let us see in every wandering Jew a proof that the Bible is true, and that Christ will one day return.

Finally, these verses teach us, that our Lord's predictions will certainly be fulfilled. He says, "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Our Lord knew well the natural unbelief of human nature. He knew that scoffers would arise in the last days, saying, where is the promise of His coming? (2 Pet. 3:4.) He knew that when He came, faith would be rare on the earth. He foresaw how many would contemptuously reject the solemn predictions He had just been delivering as improbable, unlikely, and absurd. He warns us all against such skeptical thoughts, with a caution of peculiar solemnity. He tells us that, whatever man may say or think, His words shall be fulfilled in their season, and shall not "pass away," unaccomplished. May we all lay to heart His warning. We live in an unbelieving age. Few believed the report of our Lord's first coming, and few believe the report of His second. (Isaiah 53:1.) Let us beware of this infection, and believe to the saving of our souls. We are not reading cunningly devised fables, but deep and momentous truths. May God give us a heart to believe them.

24:37-51. Exhortations to watchfulness

MATTHEW 24:36-51

But no one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

"As the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they didn't know until the flood came, and took them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field--one will be taken and one will be left; two women grinding at the mill, one will be taken and one will be left. Watch therefore, for you don't know in what hour your Lord comes. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore also be ready, for in an hour that you don't expect, the Son of Man will come.

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing so when he comes. Most certainly I tell you that he will set him over all that he has. But if that evil servant should say in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come in a day when he doesn't expect it, and in an hour when he doesn't know it, and will cut him in pieces, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. There is where the weeping and gnashing of teeth will be.

There are verses in this passage which are often much misapplied. "The coming of the Son of man" is often spoken of as being the same thing as death. The texts which describe the uncertainty of His coming are often used in epitaphs, and thought suitable to the tomb. But there is really no solid ground for such an application of this passage. Death is one thing, and the coming of the Son of man is quite another. The subject of these verses is not death, but the second advent of Jesus Christ. Let us remember this. It is a serious thing to wrest Scripture out of its true meaning.

The first thing that demands our attention in these verses, is the dreadful account that they give of the state of the world when the Lord Jesus comes again.

The world will not be converted when Christ returns. It will be found in the same condition that it was in the day of the flood. When the flood came, men were found "eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage," absorbed in their worldly pursuits, and utterly regardless of Noah's repeated warnings. They saw no likelihood of a flood. They would not believe there was any danger. But at last the flood came suddenly and "took them all away." All that were not with Noah in the ark were drowned. They were all swept away to their last account, unpardoned, unconverted, and unprepared to meet God. And our Lord says, "so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

Let us mark this text, and store it up in our minds. There are many strange opinions current on this subject, even among good men. Let us not flatter ourselves that the heathen will all be converted, and the earth filled with the knowledge of God, before the Lord comes. Let us not dream that the end of all things cannot be at hand, because there is yet much wickedness both in the Church and in the world. Such views receive a flat contradiction in the passage now before us. The days of Noah are the true type of the days when Christ shall return. Millions of professing Christians will be found thoughtless, unbelieving, godless, Christless, worldly, and unfit to meet their Judge. Let us take heed that we are not found among them.

The second thing that demands our attention, is the dreadful SEPARATION that will take place when the Lord Jesus comes again. We read twice over, that "one shall be taken and the other left."

The godly and the ungodly, at present, are all mingled together. In the congregation and in the place of worship--in the city and in the field--the children of God and the children of the world are all side by side. But it shall not be so always. In the day of our Lord's return, there shall at length be a complete division. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; at the last trumpet, each party shall be separated from the other forever more. Wives shall be separated from husbands--parents from children--brothers from sisters--masters from servants--preachers from hearers. There shall be no time for parting words, or a change of mind, when the Lord appears. All shall be taken as they are, and reap according as they have sown. Believers shall be caught up to glory, honor, and eternal life. Unbelievers shall be left behind to shame and everlasting contempt. Blessed and happy are they who are of one heart in following Christ! Their union alone shall never be broken. It shall last for evermore. Who can describe the happiness of those who are taken, when the Lord returns? Who can imagine the misery of those who are left behind? May we think on these things and consider our ways.

The last thing that demands our attention in these verses, is the practical duty of watchfulness in the prospect of Christ's second coming. "WATCH," says our Lord, "for you don't know in what hour your Lord comes." "BE READY, for in an hour that you don't expect, the Son of Man will come."

This is a point which our blessed Master frequently presses upon our notice. We hardly ever find Him dwelling on the second advent without adding an injunction to "watch." He knows the sleepiness of our nature. He knows how soon we forget the most solemn subjects in religion. He knows how unceasingly Satan labours to obscure the glorious doctrine of His coming again. He arms us with heart-searching exhortations to keep awake, if we would not be ruined for evermore. May we all have an ear to hear them.

True Christians ought to live like WATCHMEN. The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. They should strive to be always on their guard. They should behave like the sentinel of an army in an enemy's land.

They should resolve by God's grace not to sleep at their post. That text of Paul deserves many a thought--"let us not sleep, as the rest do, but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thess. 5:6.)

True Christians ought to live like GOOD SERVANTS, whose master is not at home. They should strive to be always ready for their master's return. They should never give way to the feeling, "my Lord is delaying his coming." They should seek to keep their hearts in such a frame, that whenever Christ appears, they may at once give Him a warm and loving reception. There is a vast depth in that saying, "Blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing so when he comes." We may well doubt whether we are true believers in Jesus, if we are not ready at any time to have our faith changed into sight.

Let us close the chapter with solemn feelings. The things we have just been reading call loudly for great searchings of heart. Let us seek to make sure that we are in Christ, and have an ark of safety when the day of wrath breaks on the world. Let us strive to live that we may be pronounced "blessed" at the last, and not cast off for evermore. Not least, let us dismiss from our minds the common idea that unfulfilled prophecy is a speculative and not a practical thing. If the things we have been considering are not practical, there is no such thing as practical religion at all. Well might John say, "Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:3.)

Chapter 25

MATTHEW 25:1-13

"Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. Those who were foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'What if there isn't enough for both us and you? You go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' While they went away to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, I don't know you.' Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

The chapter we have now begun is a continuation of our Lord's prophetical discourse on the Mount of Olives. The time to which it all refers is plain and unmistakable. From first to last, there is a continual reference to the second advent of Christ, and the end of the world. The whole chapter contains three great divisions. In the first, our Lord uses his own second coming as an argument for watchfulness and heart-religion. This He does by the parable of the ten virgins. In the second, He uses His own second coming as an argument for diligence and faithfulness. This He does by the parable of the talents. In the third, He winds up all by a description of the great day of judgment, a passage which for majesty and beauty stands unequaled in the New Testament.

The parable of the ten virgins, which we have now read, contains lessons peculiarly solemn and awakening. Let us see what they are.

We see for one thing, that the second coming of Christ will find His Church a mixed body, containing evil as well as good.

The professing Church is compared to "ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom." All of them had lamps, but only five had oil in their vessels to feed the flame. All of them professed to have one object in view, but five only were truly wise, and the rest were foolish. The visible Church of Christ is just in the same condition. All its members are baptized in the name of Christ, but not all really hear His voice and follow Him. All are

called Christians, and profess to be of the Christian religion, but not all have the grace of the Spirit in their hearts, and really are what they profess to be. Our own eyes tell us that it is so now. The Lord Jesus tells us that it will be so, when He comes again.

Let us mark well this description. It is a humbling picture. After all our preachings and prayings--after all our visiting and teaching--after all our missionary exertions abroad, and means of grace at home, many will be found at last "dead in trespasses and sins!" The wickedness and unbelief of human nature, is a subject about which we have all much to learn.

We see, for another thing, that Christ's second coming, whenever it may be, will take men by surprise.

This is a truth which is set before us in the parable, in a very striking manner. At midnight, when the virgins were slumbering and sleeping, there was a cry, "The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!" It will be just the same, when Jesus returns to the world. He will find the vast majority of mankind utterly unbelieving and unprepared. He will find the bulk of His believing people in a sleepy and indolent state of soul. Business will be going on in town and country, just as it does now. Politics, trades, farming, buying, selling, pleasure-seeking, will be taking up men's attention, just as they do now. Rich men will still be faring sumptuously, and poor men murmuring and complaining. Churches will still be full of divisions, and wrangling about trifles, and theological controversies will be still raging. Ministers will still be calling men to repent, and congregations still putting off the day of decision. In the midst of all this, the Lord Jesus Himself shall suddenly appear. In an hour when no man thinks, the startled world shall be summoned to break off all its employments, and to stand before its lawful King. There is something unspeakably dreadful in the idea. But thus it is written and thus it shall be. Well might a dying minister say, "we are none of us more than half-awake."

We see, in the next place, that when the Lord comes again, many will find out the value of saving religion too late.

The parable tells us that when the bridegroom came, the foolish virgins said unto the wise, "give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." It tells us further, that as the wise had no oil to spare, the foolish went to "buy for themselves." It tells us finally, that they came when the door was shut, and asked in vain for admission. "Lord, Lord," they cried, "open to us." All these expressions are striking emblems of things to come. Let us take heed that we do not find them true by experience, to our own eternal ruin.

We may settle it in our minds, that there will be an entire change of opinion one day as to the necessity of decided Christianity. At present, we must all be aware, the vast majority of professing Christians care nothing at all about it. They have no sense of sin. They have no love towards Christ. They know nothing of being born again. Repentance, and faith, and grace, and holiness, are mere words and names to them. They are subjects which they either dislike, or about which they feel no concern. But all this state of things shall one day come to an end. Knowledge, conviction, the value of the soul, the need of a Savior, shall all burst on men's minds one day like a flash of lightning. But alas! it will be too late. It will be too late to be buying oil, when the Lord returns. The mistakes that are not found out until that day are irretrievable.

Are we ever mocked and persecuted and thought foolish because of our religion? Let us bear it patiently, and pray for those who persecute us. They know not what they are doing. They will certainly alter their minds one day. We may yet hear them confessing, that we were wise and they were foolish. The whole world shall one day acknowledge, that the saints of God made a wise choice.

We see, lastly, in this parable, that when Christ returns, true Christians shall receive a rich reward for all they have suffered for their Master's sake. We are told that when the bridegroom came, "those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut."

True Christians shall alone be found ready at the second advent. Washed in the blood of atonement, clothed in Christ's righteousness, renewed by the Spirit, they shall meet their Lord with boldness, and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, to go out no more. Surely this is a blessed prospect.

They shall be with their Lord--with Him who loved them and gave Himself for them--with Him who bore with them, and carried them through their earthly pilgrimage--with Him, whom they loved truly and followed faithfully on earth, though with much weakness, and many a tear. Surely this also is a blessed prospect.

The door shall be shut at last--shut on all pain and sorrow--shut on an ill-natured and wicked world--shut on a tempting devil--shut on all doubts and fears--shut, to be opened again no more. Surely, we may again say, this is a blessed prospect.

Let us remember these things. They will bear meditation. They are all true. The believer may have much tribulation, but he has before him abounding

consolations. Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. The day of Christ's return shall surely make amends for all.

Let us leave this parable with a settled determination, never to be content with anything short of indwelling grace in our hearts. The lamp and the name of Christian the profession and the ordinances of Christianity, are all well in their way, but they are not the one thing needful. Let us never rest until we know that we have the oil of the Spirit in our hearts.

MATTHEW 25:14-30

"For it is like a man, going into another country, who called his own servants, and entrusted his goods to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his own ability. Then he went on his journey. Immediately he who received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. In like manner he also who got the two gained another two. But he who received the one went away and dug in the earth, and hid his master's money.

"Now after a long time the master of those servants came, and reconciled accounts with them. He who received the five talents came and brought another five talents, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents. Behold, I have gained another five talents besides them.'

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'

"He also who got the two talents came and said, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents. Behold, I have gained another two talents besides them.'

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'

"He also who had received the one talent came and said, 'Master, I knew you that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter. I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the earth. Behold, you have what is yours.'

"But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant. You knew that I reap where I didn't sow, and gather where I didn't scatter. You ought therefore to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I

should have received back my own with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away. Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

The parable of the talents which we have now read is near akin to that of the ten virgins. Both direct our minds to the same important event, the second advent of Jesus Christ. Both bring before us the same people, the members of the professing Church of Christ. The virgins and the servants are one and the same people, but the same people regarded from a different point, and viewed on different sides. The practical lesson of each parable is the main point of difference. Vigilance is the key note of the first parable, diligence that of the second. The story of the virgins calls on the Church to WATCH, the story of the talents calls on the Church to WORK.

We learn, in the first place, from this parable, that all professing Christians have received something from God. We are all God's "servants." We have all "talents" entrusted to our charge.

The word "talents" is an expression that has been curiously turned aside from its original meaning. It is generally applied to none but people of remarkable ability or gifts. They are called "talented" people. Such an use of the expression is a mere modern invention. In the sense in which our Lord used the word in this parable, it applies to all baptized people without distinction. We have all talents in God's sight. We are all talented people.

Anything whereby we may glorify God is a talent. Our gifts, our influence, our money, our knowledge, our health, our strength, our time, our senses, our reason, our intellect, our memory, our affections, our privileges as members of Christ's Church, our advantages as possessors of the Bible--all, all are talents. Whence came these things? What hand bestowed them? Why are we what we are? Why are we not the worms that crawl on the earth? There is only one answer to these questions. All that we have is a loan from God. We are God's stewards. We are God's debtors. Let this thought sink deeply into our hearts.

We learn in the second place, that many make a bad use of the privileges and mercies they receive from God. We are told in the parable of one who "dug in the earth and hid his Lord's money." That man represents a large class of mankind.

To hide our talent is to neglect opportunities of glorifying God, when we have them. The Bible-despiser, the prayer-neglecter, and the Sabbath-breaker--the unbelieving, the sensual, and the earthly-minded--the trifler, the thoughtless, and the pleasure-seeker--the money-lover, the covetous, and the self-indulgent--all, all are alike burying their Lord's money in the ground. They have all light that they do not use. They might all be better than they are. But they are all daily robbing God. He has lent them much and they make Him no return. The words of Daniel to Belshazzar, are strictly applicable to every unconverted person--"the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, you have not glorified." (Dan. 5:23.)

We learn in the third place, that all professing Christians must one day have a reckoning with God. The parable tells us that "after a long time the master of those servants came, and reckoned with them."

There is a judgment before us all. Words have no meaning in the Bible, if there is none. It is mere trifling with Scripture to deny it. There is a judgment before us according to our works--certain, strict, and unavoidable. High or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, we shall all have to stand at the bar of God and to receive our eternal sentence. There will be no escape. Concealment will be impossible. We and God must at last meet face to face. We shall have to render an account of every privilege that was granted to us, and of every ray of light that we enjoyed. We shall find that we are dealt with as accountable and responsible creatures, and that to whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required. Let us remember this every day we live. Let us "judge ourselves that we be not condemned of the Lord."

We learn, in the fourth place, that true Christians will receive an abundant reward in the great day of reckoning. The parable tells us that the servants who had used their Lord's money well, were commended as "good and faithful," and told to "enter into the joy of their Lord."

These words are full of comfort to all believers, and may well fill us with wonder and surprise. The best of Christians is a poor frail creature, and needs the blood of atonement every day that he lives. But the least and lowest of believers will find that he is counted among Christ's servants, and that his labor has not been in vain in the Lord. He will discover to his amazement, that his Master's eye saw more beauty in his efforts to please Him, than he ever saw himself. He will find that every hour spent in Christ's service, and every word spoken on Christ's behalf, has been written in a book of remembrance. Let believers remember these things and take courage. The cross may be heavy now,

but the glorious reward shall make amends for all. Well says Leighton, "Here some drops of joy enter into us, but there we shall enter into joy."

We learn in the last place, that all unfruitful members of Christ's Church will be condemned and cast away in the day of judgment. The parable tells us that the servant who buried his master's money, was condemned as "wicked," "slothful," and "unprofitable," and cast into "outer darkness." And our Lord adds the solemn words, "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

There will be no excuse for an unconverted Christian at the last day. The reasons with which he now pretends to satisfy himself will prove useless and vain. The Judge of all the earth will be found to have done right. The ruin of the lost soul will be found to be his own fault. Those words of our Lord, "you knew," are words that ought to ring loudly in many a man's ears, and pierce him to the heart. Thousands are living at this day without Christ and without conversion, and yet pretending that they cannot help it. And all this time they know in their own conscience that they are guilty. They are burying their talent. They are not doing what they can. Happy are they who find this out betimes. It will all come out at the last day.

Let us leave this parable with a solemn determination, by God's grace, never to be content with a profession of Christianity without practice. Let us not only talk about religion, but act. Let us not only feel the importance of religion, but do something too. We are not told that the unprofitable servant was a murderer, or a thief, or even a waster of his Lord's money. But he did nothing--and this was his ruin. Let us beware of a do-nothing Christianity. Such Christianity does not come from the Spirit of God. "To do no harm," says Baxter, "is the praise of a stone, not of a man."

25:31-46. The judgment of the nations

MATTHEW 25:31-46

"But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?'

"The King will answer them, 'Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

"Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?'

"Then he will answer them, saying, 'Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.' These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

In these verses our Lord Jesus Christ describes the judgment-day, and some of its leading circumstances. There are few passages in the whole Bible more solemn and heart-searching than this. May we read it with the deep and serious attention which it deserves.

Let us mark in the first place, who will be the JUDGE in the last day. We read that it will be "the Son of Man," Jesus Christ Himself.

That same Jesus who was born in the manger of Bethlehem, and took upon Him the form of a servant--who was despised and rejected of men, and often had not where to lay His head--who was condemned by the princes of this world, beaten, scourged, and nailed to the cross--that same Jesus shall Himself judge the world, when He comes in His glory. To Him the Father has committed all judgment. (John 5:22.) To Him at last every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord. (Philip. 2:10, 11.)

Let believers think of this, and take comfort. He that sits upon the throne in that great and dreadful day will be their Saviour, their Shepherd, their High Priest, their elder Brother, their Friend. When they see Him, they will have no cause to be alarmed.

Let unconverted people think of this, and be afraid. Their judge will be that very Christ, whose Gospel they now despise, and whose gracious invitations

they refuse to hear. How great will be their confusion at last, if they go on in unbelief and die in their sins! To be condemned in the day of judgment by any one would be dreadful. But to be condemned by Him who would have saved them will be dreadful indeed. Well may the Psalmist say, "Kiss the Son lest he be angry." (Psalm 2:12.)

Let us mark, in the second place, who will be JUDGED in the last day. We read that before Christ "shall be gathered all nations."

All that have ever lived shall one day give account of themselves at the bar of Christ. All must obey the summons of the great King, and come forward to receive their sentence. Those who would not come to worship Christ on earth, will find they must come to His great assize, when He returns to judge the world.

All that are judged will be divided into two great classes. There will no longer be any distinction between kings and subjects, or masters and servants, or dissenters and churchmen. There will be no mention of ranks and denominations, for the former things will have passed away. Grace, or no grace, conversion or unconversion, faith or no faith, will be the only distinctions at the last day. All that are found in Christ will be placed among the sheep at His right hand. All that are not found in Christ will be placed among the goats at His left. Well says Sherlock, "Our separations will avail us nothing, unless we take care to be found in the number of Christ's sheep, when He comes to judgment."

Let us mark, in the third place, in what manner the JUDGMENT will be conducted in the last day. We read of several striking particulars on this point. Let us see what they are.

The last judgment will be a judgment according to evidence. The works of men are the witnesses which will be brought forward, and above all their works of charity. The question to be ascertained will not merely be what we said, but what we did--not merely what we professed, but what we practiced. Our works unquestionably will not justify us. We are justified by faith without the deeds of the law. But the truth of our faith will be tested by our lives. Faith which has not works is dead, being alone. (James 2:20.)

The last judgment will be a judgment that will bring joy to all true believers. They will hear those precious words, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom." They will be owned and confessed by their Master before His Father and the holy angels. They shall find that the wages He gives to His

faithful servants are nothing less than "a kingdom." The least, and lowest, and poorest, of the family of God, shall have a crown of glory, and be a king.

The last judgment will be a judgment that will bring confusion on all unconverted people. They will hear those dreadful words, "Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire." They will be disowned by the great Head of the Church before the assembled world. They will find that as they would sow to the flesh, so of the flesh they must reap corruption. They would not hear Christ, when He said "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," and now they must hear Him say, "Depart, into everlasting fire." They would not carry his cross, and so they can have no place in his kingdom.

The last judgment will be a judgment that will strikingly bring out the characters both of the lost and saved. They on the right hand, who are Christ's sheep, will still be "clothed with humility." They will marvel to hear any work of theirs brought forward and commended. They on the left hand, who are not Christ's, will still be blind and self-righteous. They will not be sensible of any neglect of Christ. "Lord," they say, "when did we see you--and not come to you?" Let this thought sink down into our hearts. Our characters on earth will prove an everlasting possession in the world to come. With the same heart that men die, with that heart they will rise again.

Let us mark, in the last place, what will be the FINAL RESULTS of the judgment day. We are told this in words that ought never to be forgotten, the wicked "will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The state of things after the judgment is changeless and without end. The misery of the lost, and the blessedness of the saved, are both alike forever. Let no man deceive us on this point. It is clearly revealed in Scripture. The eternity of God, and heaven, and hell, all stand on the same foundation. As surely as God is eternal, so surely is heaven an endless day without night, and hell an endless night without day.

Who shall describe THE BLESSEDNESS OF ETERNAL LIFE? It passes the power of man to conceive. It can only be measured by contrast and comparison. An eternal rest, after warfare and conflict--the eternal company of saints, after buffeting with an evil world--an eternally glorious and painless body, after struggling with weakness and infirmity--an eternal sight of Jesus face to face, after only hearing and believing--all this is blessedness indeed. And yet the half of it remains untold.

Who shall describe THE MISERY OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT? It is something utterly indescribable and inconceivable. The eternal pain of body--the eternal sting of an accusing conscience--the eternal society of none but the wicked, the devil and his angels--the eternal remembrance of opportunities neglected and Christ despised--the eternal prospect of a weary, hopeless future--all this is misery indeed. It is enough to make our ears tingle, and our blood run cold. And yet this picture is nothing, compared to the reality.

Let us close these verses with serious self-inquiry. Let us ask ourselves on which side of Christ we are likely to be at the last day. Shall we be on the right hand, or shall we be on the left? Happy is he who never rests until he can give a satisfactory answer to this question.

Chapter 26

26.Betrayal and arrest of the rejected King

Verses 1-16. His anointing for death

MATTHEW 26:1-13

It happened, when Jesus had finished all these words, that he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas. They took counsel together that they might take Jesus by deceit, and kill him. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest a riot occur among the people."

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him having an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when his disciples saw this, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor."

However, knowing this, Jesus said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? Because she has done a good work for me. For you always have the poor with you; but you don't always have me. For in pouring this ointment on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Most certainly I tell you, wherever this Good News is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of as a memorial of her."

We now approach the closing scene of our Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. Hitherto we have read of His sayings and doings--we are now about to read of His sufferings and death. Hitherto we have seen him as the great Prophet--we are now about to see Him as the great High Priest.

It is a portion of Scripture which ought to be read with peculiar reverence and attention. The place whereon we stand is holy ground. Here we see how the Seed of the woman bruised the Serpent's head. Here we see the great sacrifice to which all the sacrifices of the Old Testament had long pointed. Here we see how the blood was shed which "cleanses from all sin," and the Lamb slain who "takes away the sin of the world." We see in the death of Christ, the great mystery revealed, how God can be just, and yet justify the ungodly. No wonder that all the four Gospels contain a full account of this wonderful event. On other points in our Lord's history, we often find, that when one evangelist speaks, the other three are silent. But when we come to the crucifixion, we find it minutely described by all four.

In these verses we have now read, let us first observe how careful our Lord is to recall the attention of His disciples to His own death. He said to them, "You know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified."

The connection of these words with the preceding chapter is exceedingly striking. Our Lord had just been dwelling on His own second coming in power and glory at the end of the world. He had been describing the last judgment, and all its dreadful accompaniments. He had been speaking of Himself as the Judge, before whose throne all nations would be gathered. And then at once, without pause or interval, He goes on to speak of His crucifixion. While the marvelous predictions of His final glory were yet ringing in the ears of His disciples, He tells them once and again of His coming sufferings. He reminds them that He must die as a sin-offering before He reigned as a king, that He must make atonement on the cross, before he took the crown.

We can never attach too much importance to the atoning death of Christ. It is the leading fact in the word of God, on which the eyes of our soul ought to be ever fixed. Without the shedding of his blood, there is no remission of sin. It is the cardinal truth on which the whole system of Christianity hinges. Without it the Gospel is an arch without a key-stone, a fair building without a foundation, a solar system without a sun. Let us make much of our Lord's incarnation and example, His miracles and his parables, His works and His words, but above all let us make much of His death. Let us delight in the hope of his second personal coming and millennial reign, but let us not think more even of these blessed

truths, than of the atonement on the cross. This, after all, is the master-truth of Scripture, that "Christ died for our sins." To this let us daily return. On this let us daily feed our souls. Some, like the Greeks of old, may sneer at the doctrine, and call it "foolishness." But let us never be ashamed to say with Paul, "Be it far from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal. 6:14.)

Let us observe, in the second place, in these verses, what honour Christ loves to put on those who honour Him. We are told that when He was "in the house of Simon the leper," a certain woman came, while He sat at table, and poured a box of precious ointment on His head. She did it, no doubt, out of reverence and affection. She had received soul-benefit from Him, and she thought no mark of honour too costly to be bestowed on Him in return. But this deed of hers called forth disapproval from some who saw it. They called it "waste." They said it might have been better to sell the ointment, and give the money to the poor. At once our Lord rebuked these cold-hearted fault-finders. He tells them that the woman has "wrought a good work," and one that he accepts and approves. And he goes on to make a striking prediction, "Wherever this Good News is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of as a memorial of her."

We see, in this little incident, how perfectly our Lord knew things to come, and how easy it is for him to confer honour. This prophecy of His about this woman is receiving a fulfilment every day before our eyes. Wherever the Gospel of Matthew is read, the deed that she did is known. The deeds and titles of many a king, and emperor, and general, are as completely forgotten, as if written in the sand. But the grateful act of one humble Christian woman is recorded in one hundred and fifty different languages, and is known all over the globe. The praise of man is but for a few days. The praise of Christ endures forever. The pathway to lasting honour, is to honour Christ.

Last, but not least, we see in this incident a blessed foretaste of things that will yet take place in the day of judgment. In that great day no honor done to Christ on earth shall be found to have been forgotten. The speeches of parliamentary orators, the exploits of warriors, the works of poets and painters, shall not be mentioned in that day. But the least work that the weakest Christian woman has done for Christ, or His members, shall be found written in a book of everlasting remembrance. Not a single kind word or deed, not a cup of cold water, or a box of ointment, shall be omitted from the record. Silver and gold she may have had none--rank, power, and influence she may not have possessed--but if she loved Christ, and confessed Christ, and worked for Christ, her memorial shall be found on high. She shall be commended before assembled worlds.

Do we know what it is to work for Christ? If we do, let us take courage, and work on. What greater encouragement can we desire than we see here? We may be laughed at and ridiculed by the world. Our motives may be misunderstood. Our conduct may be misrepresented. Our sacrifices for Christ's sake may be called "waste,"--waste of time, waste of money, waste of strength. Let none of these things move us. The eye of Him who sat in Simon's house in Bethany is upon us. He notes all we do, and is well-pleased. Let us be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, because we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. 15:58.)



The room where Jesus and his disciples conducted the Passover meal – The Last Supper on Mount Zion in Jerusalem

Verses 17-35. The Passover and the Lord's Supper

MATTHEW 26:14-25

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests, and said, "What are you willing to give me, that I should deliver him to you?" They weighed out for him thirty pieces of silver. From that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

Now on the first day of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying to him, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?"

He said, "Go into the city to a certain person, and tell him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples."'"

The disciples did as Jesus commanded them, and they prepared the Passover. Now when evening had come, he was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. As they were eating, he said, "Most certainly I tell you that one of you will betray me."

They were exceedingly sorrowful, and each began to ask him, "It isn't me, is it, Lord?"

He answered, "He who dipped his hand with me in the dish, the same will betray me. The Son of Man goes, even as it is written of him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had not been born."

Judas, who betrayed him, answered, "It isn't me, is it, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."

We read in the beginning of this passage, how our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed into the hands of His deadly enemies. The priests and scribes, however anxious to put him to death, were at a loss how to effect their purpose, for fear of an uproar among the people. At this juncture a fitting instrument for carrying out their designs, offered himself to them, in the person of Judas Iscariot. That false apostle undertook to deliver his Master into their hands, for thirty pieces of silver.

There are few blacker pages in all history, than the character and conduct of Judas Iscariot. There is no more dreadful evidence of the wickedness of man. A poet of our own has said, that "sharper than a serpent's tooth is a thankless child." But what shall we say of a disciple who could betray his own Master--an apostle who could sell Christ? Surely this was not the least bitter part of the cup of suffering which our Lord drank.

Let us learn, in the first place, from these verses, that a man may enjoy great privileges, and make a great religious profession, and yet his heart all the time may not be right before God.

Judas Iscariot had the highest possible religious privileges. He was a chosen apostle, and companion of Christ. He was an eye-witness of our Lord's miracles, and a hearer of His sermons. He saw what Abraham and Moses never saw, and

heard what David and Isaiah never heard. He lived in the society of the eleven apostles. He was a fellow-laborer with Peter, James, and John. But for all this his heart was never changed. He clung to one darling sin.

Judas Iscariot made a reputable profession of religion. There was nothing but what was right, and proper, and becoming in his outward conduct. Like the other apostles, he appeared to believe and to give up all for Christ's sake. Like them he was sent forth to preach and work miracles. No one of the eleven appears to have suspected him of hypocrisy. When our Lord said, "One of you shall betray me," no one said, "Is it Judas?" Yet all this time his heart was never changed.

We ought to observe these things. They are deeply humbling and instructive. Like Lot's wife, Judas is intended to be a beacon to the whole church. Let us often think about him, and say, as we think, "Search me, O Lord, and try my heart, and see if there be any wicked way in me." Let us resolve, by God's grace, that we will never be content with anything short of sound, thorough, heart conversion.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, that the love of money is one of the greatest snares to a man's soul. We cannot conceive a clearer proof of this, than the case of Judas. That wretched question, "What will you give me?" reveals the secret sin which was his ruin. He had given up much for Christ's sake, but he had not given up his covetousness.

The words of the apostle Paul should often ring in our ears, "the love of money is the root of all evil." (1 Tim. 6:10.) The history of the Church abounds in illustrations of this truth. For money Joseph was sold by his brethren. For money Samson was betrayed to the Philistines. For money Gehazi deceived Naaman, and lied to Elisha. For money Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive Peter. For money the Son of God was delivered into the hands of wicked men. Astonishing indeed does it seem that the cause of so much evil should be loved so well.

Let us all be on our guard against the love of money. The world is full of it in our days. The plague is abroad. Thousands who would abhor the idea of worshiping Juggernaut, are not ashamed to make an idol of gold. We are all liable to the infection, from the least to the greatest. We may love money without having it, just as we may have money without loving it. It is an evil that works very deceitfully. It carries us captives before we are aware of our chains. Once let it get the mastery, and it will harden, paralyze, scorch, freeze, blight, and wither our souls. It overthrew an apostle of Christ. Let us take heed that it

does not overthrow us. One leak may sink a ship. One unmortified sin may ruin a soul.

We ought frequently to call to mind the solemn words, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and lose his own soul?" "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." Our daily prayer should be, "Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is needful for me." (Prov. 30:8.) Our constant aim should be to be rich in grace. Those who "will be rich" in worldly possessions often find at last that they have made the worst of bargains. Like Esau, they have bartered an eternal portion for a little temporary gratification. Like Judas Iscariot, they have sold themselves to everlasting perdition.

Let us learn, in the last place, from these verses, the hopeless condition of all who die unconverted. The words of our Lord on this subject are peculiarly solemn. He says of Judas, "It would have been better for that man, if he had not been born." This saying admits of only one interpretation. It teaches plainly, that it is better never to live at all, than to live without faith, and to die without grace. To die in this state is to be ruined forever more. It is a fall from which there is no rising. It is a loss which is utterly irretrievable. There is no change in hell. The gulf between hell and heaven is one that no man can pass. This saying could never have been used, if there was any truth in the doctrine of 'universal salvation'. If it really was true that all would sooner or later reach heaven, and hell sooner or later be emptied of inhabitants, it never could be said that it would have been "good for a man not to have been born." Hell itself would lose its terrors, if it had an end. Hell itself would be endurable, if after millions of ages there was a HOPE of freedom and of heaven. But universal salvation will find no foot-hold in Scripture. The teaching of the word of God is plain and express on the subject. There is a worm that never dies, and a fire that is not quenched (Mark 9:44.) "Except a man be born again," he will wish one day he had never been born at all. "Better," says Burkitt, "have no being, than not have a being in Christ."

Let us grasp this truth firmly, and not let it go. There are always people who dislike the reality and eternity of hell. We live in a day when a morbid charity induces many to exaggerate God's mercy, at the expense of His justice, and when false teachers are daring to talk of a "love of God, lower even than hell." Let us resist such teaching with a holy jealousy, and abide by the doctrine of Holy Scripture. Let us not be ashamed to walk in the old paths, and to believe that there is an eternal God, an eternal heaven, and an eternal hell. Once depart from this belief, and we admit the thin edge of the wedge of skepticism, and may at last deny any doctrine of the Gospel. We may rest assured that there is no

firm standing ground between a belief in the eternity of hell, and downright infidelity.

MATTHEW 26:26-35

As they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks for it, and broke it. He gave to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, "All of you drink it, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins. But I tell you that I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's Kingdom." When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of me tonight, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee."

But Peter answered him, "Even if all will be made to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble."

Jesus said to him, "Most certainly I tell you that tonight, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."

Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you." All of the disciples also said likewise.

These verses describe the appointment of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Our Lord knew well the things that were before Him, and graciously chose the last quiet evening that he could have before his crucifixion, as an occasion for bestowing a parting gift on his church. How precious must this ordinance have afterwards appeared to His disciples, when they remembered the events of that night. How mournful is the thought, that no ordinance has led to such fierce controversy, and been so grievously misunderstood, as the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It ought to have united the church, but our sins have made it a cause of division. The thing which should have been for our welfare, has been too often made an occasion of falling.

The first thing that demands our notice in these verses, is the right meaning of our Lord's words, "this is my body, this is my blood."

It is needless to say, that this question has divided the visible church of Christ. It has caused volumes of controversial theology to be written. But we must not shrink from having decided opinions upon it, because theologians have

disputed and differed. Unsoundness on this point has given rise to many deplorable superstitions.

The plain meaning of our Lord's words appears to be this--"This bread represents my body. This wine represents my blood." He did not mean that the bread He gave to His disciples was really and literally His body. He did not mean that the wine He gave to His disciples was really and literally His blood. Let us lay firm hold on this interpretation. It may be supported by several grave reasons.

The conduct of the disciples at the Lord's Supper forbids us to believe that the bread they received was Christ's body, and the wine they received was Christ's blood. They were all Jews, taught from their infancy to believe that it was sinful to eat flesh with the blood. (Deut. 12:23-25.) Yet there is nothing in the narrative to show that they were startled by our Lord's words. They evidently perceived no change in the bread and wine.

Our own senses at the present day forbid us to believe that there is any change in the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Our own taste tells us that they are really and literally what they appear to be. Things above our reason the Bible requires us to believe. But we are never bid to believe that which contradicts our senses.

The true doctrine about our Lord's human nature forbids us to believe that the bread in the Lord's Supper can be His body, or the wine His blood. The natural body of Christ cannot be at one time in more places than one. If our Lord's body could sit at table, and at the same time be eaten by the disciples, it is perfectly clear that it was not a human body like our own. But this we must never allow for one moment. It is the glory of Christianity that our Redeemer is perfect man as well as perfect God.

Finally, the genius of the language in which our Lord spoke at the Lord's Supper, makes it entirely unnecessary to interpret His words literally. The Bible is full of expressions of a similar kind, to which no one thinks of giving any but a figurative meaning. Our Lord speaks of Himself as the "door" and the "vine," and we know that he is using emblems and figures, when He so speaks. There is therefore no inconsistency in supposing that He used figurative language when He appointed the Lord's Supper; and we have the more right to say so, when we remember the grave objections which stand in the way of a literal view of His words.

Let us lay up these things in our minds, and not forget them. In a day of abounding heresy, it is good to be well armed. Ignorant and confused views of the meaning of Scripture language, are one great cause of religious error.

The second thing which demands our notice in these verses, is the purpose and object for which the Lord's Supper was appointed.

This is a subject again on which great darkness prevails. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper has been regarded as something mysterious and past understanding. Immense harm has been done to Christianity by the vague and high-flown language in which many writers have indulged in treating of the sacrament. There is certainly nothing to warrant such language in the account of its original institution. The more simple our views of its purpose, the more Scriptural they are likely to be.

The Lord's Supper is not a sacrifice. There is no oblation in it--no offering up of anything but our prayers, praises, and thanksgivings. From the day that Jesus died there needed no more offering for sin. By one offering He perfected forever those who are sanctified. (Heb. 10:14.) Priests, altars, and sacrifices, all ceased to be necessary, when the Lamb of God offered up Himself. Their office came to an end. Their work was done.

The Lord's Supper has no power to automatically confer benefit on those who come to it, if they do not come to it with faith. The mere formal act of eating the bread and drinking the wine is utterly unprofitable, unless it is done with a right heart. It is eminently an ordinance for the living soul, not for the dead--for the converted, not for the unconverted.

The Lord's Supper was ordained for a continual remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ's death, until He comes again. The benefits it confers, are spiritual, not physical. Its effects must be looked for in our inward man. It was intended to remind us, by the visible, tangible emblems of bread and wine, that the offering of Christ's body and blood for us on the cross, is the only atonement for sin, and the life of a believer's soul. It was meant to help our poor weak faith to closer fellowship with our crucified Saviour, and to assist us in spiritually feeding on Christ's body and blood. It is an ordinance for redeemed sinners, and not for unfallen angels. By receiving it we publicly declare our sense of guilt, and need of a Saviour--our trust in Jesus, and our love to Him--our desire to live upon Him, and our hope to live with Him. Using it in this spirit, we shall find our repentance deepened, our faith increased, our hope brightened, and our love enlarged--our besetting sins weakened, and our graces strengthened. It will draw us nearer to Christ.

Let us bear these things in mind. They need to be remembered in these latter days. There is nothing in our religion which we are so ready to pervert and misunderstand as those parts which approach our senses. Whatever we can touch with our hand, and see with our eyes, we are apt to exalt into an idol, or to expect good from it as a mere charm. Let us especially beware of this tendency in the matter of the Lord's Supper. Above all, "let us take heed," in the words of the Homily, "lest of the memory it be made a sacrifice."

The last thing which deserves a brief notice in this passage, is the character of the first communicants. It is a point full of comfort and instruction.

The little company to which the bread and wine were first administered by our Lord, was composed of the apostles, whom He had chosen to accompany Him during His earthly ministry. They were poor and unlearned men, who loved Christ, but were weak alike in faith and knowledge. They knew but little of the full meaning of their Master's sayings and doings. They knew but little of the frailty of their own hearts. They thought they were ready to die with Jesus, and yet that very night they all forsook Him and fled. All this our Lord knew perfectly well. The state of their hearts was not hidden from Him. And yet He did not keep back from them the Lord's Supper.

There is something very instructive in this circumstance--It shows us plainly that we must not make great knowledge, and great strength of grace, an indispensable qualification for communicants. A man may know but little, and be no better than a child in spiritual strength, but he is not on that account to be excluded from the Lord's table. Does he really feel his sins? Does he really love Christ? Does he really desire to serve Him? If this be so, we ought to encourage and receive him. Doubtless we must do all we can to exclude unworthy communicants. No graceless person ought to come to the Lord's Supper. But we must take heed that we do not reject those whom Christ has not rejected. There is no wisdom in being more strict than our Lord and His apostles.

Let us leave the passage with serious self-inquiry as to our own conduct with respect to the Lord's Supper. Do we turn away from it, when it is administered? If so, how can we justify our conduct? It will not do to say it is not a necessary ordinance. To say so is to pour contempt on Christ Himself, and declare that we do not obey Him. It will not do to say that we feel unworthy to come to the Lord's table. To say so is to declare that we are unfit to die, and unprepared to meet God. These are solemn considerations. All non-communicants should ponder them well.

Are we in the habit of coming to the Lord's table? If so, in what frame of mind do we come? Do we draw near intelligently, humbly, and with faith? Do we understand what we are doing? Do we really feel our sinfulness and need of Christ? Do we really desire to live a Christian life, as well as profess the Christian faith? Happy is that soul who can give a satisfactory answer to these questions. Let him go forward, and persevere.

Verses 36-56. Christ’s agony at Gethsemane

MATTHEW 26:36-46

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and severely troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here, and watch with me."

He went forward a little, fell on his face, and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire."

He came to the disciples, and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What, couldn't you watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray, that you don't enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Again, a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cup can't pass away from me unless I drink it, your desire be done." He came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. He left them again, went away, and prayed a third time, saying the same words. Then he came to his disciples, and said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest. Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let's be going. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand."

The verses we have now read, describe what is commonly called Christ's agony at Gethsemane. It is a passage which undoubtedly contains deep and mysterious things. We ought to read it with reverence and wonder, for there is much in it which we cannot fully comprehend.

Why do we find our Lord so "sorrowful and very heavy," as he is here described? What are we to make of His words, "my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death?" Why do we see Him going apart from His disciples, and falling on His face, and crying to His Father with strong cries, and thrice-repeated prayer? Why is the Almighty Son of God, who had worked so many

miracles, so heavy and disturbed? Why is Jesus, who came into the world to die, so like one ready to faint at the approach of death? Why is all this?

There is but one reasonable answer to these questions. The weight that pressed down our Lord's soul, was not the fear of death, and its pains. Thousands have endured the most agonizing sufferings of body, and died without a groan, and so, no doubt, might our Lord. But the real weight that bowed down the heart of Jesus, was the weight of the sin of the world, which seems to have now pressed down upon Him with peculiar force. It was the burden of our guilt imputed to Him, which was now laid on Him, as on the head of the scapegoat. How great that burden must have been, no heart of man can conceive. It is known only to God. Well may the Greek Litany speak of the "unknown sufferings of Christ." The words of Scott on this subject are probably correct--"Christ at this time endured as much misery, of the same kind with that of condemned spirits, as could possibly consist with a pure conscience, perfect love of God and man, and an assured confidence of a glorious event."

But however mysterious this part of our Lord's history may seem to us, we must not fail to observe the precious lessons of practical instruction, which it contains. Let us now see what those lessons are.

Let us learn, in the first place, that prayer is the best practical remedy that we can use in time of trouble. We see that Christ Himself prayed, when His soul was sorrowful. All true Christians ought to do the same.

Trouble is a cup that all must drink in this world of sin. We are "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." (Job 5:7.) We cannot avoid it. Of all creatures, none is so vulnerable as man. Our bodies, our minds, our families, our business, our friends, are all so many doors through which trial will come in. The holiest saints can claim no exemption from it. Like their Master, they are often "men of sorrow."

But what is the first thing to be done in time of trouble? We must pray. Like Job, we must fall down and worship. (Job 1:20.) Like Hezekiah, we must spread our matters before the Lord. (2 Kings 19:14.) The first person we must turn to for help, must be our God. We must tell all our sorrow to our Father in heaven. We must believe confidently that nothing is too trivial or minute to be laid before Him, so long as we do it with entire submission to His will. It is the mark of faith to keep nothing back from our best Friend. So doing, we may be sure we shall have an answer. "If it be possible," and the thing we ask is for God's glory, it shall be done. The thorn in the flesh shall either be removed, or grace to endure it will be given to us, as it was to Paul. (2 Cor. 12:9.) May we all store up

this lesson against the day of need. It is a true saying, that "prayers are the leeches of care."

Let us learn, in the second place, that entire submission of will to the will of God should be one of our chief aims in this world. The words of our Lord are a beautiful example of the spirit that we should follow after in this matter. He says, "Not as I will, but as You will." He says again, "may Your will be done."

A will unsanctified and uncontrolled, is one great cause of unhappiness in life. It may be seen in little infants. It is born with us. We all like our own way. We wish and want many things, and forget that we are entirely ignorant what is for our good, and unfit to choose for ourselves. Happy is he who has learned to have no wishes, and in every state to be content. It is a lesson which we are slow to learn, and like Paul, we must learn it not in the school of mortal man, but of Christ. (Phil. 4:11.)

Would we know whether we are born again, and growing in grace? Let us see how it is with us in the matter of our wills. Can we bear disappointment? Can we put up patiently with unexpected trials and vexations? Can we see our pet plans, and darling schemes crossed without murmuring and complaint? Can we sit still, and suffer calmly, as well as go up and down and work actively? These are the things that prove whether we have the mind of Christ. It ought never to be forgotten, that warm feelings and joyful frames are not the truest evidences of grace. A mortified will is a far more valuable possession. Even our Lord Himself did not always rejoice; but He could always say, "may Your will be done."

Let us learn, in the last place, that there is great weakness, even in true disciples of Christ, and that they have need to watch and pray against it. We see Peter, James, and John--those three chosen apostles, sleeping when they ought to have been watching and praying. And we find our Lord addressing them in these solemn words, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation--the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

There is a double nature in all believers. Converted, renewed, sanctified as they are, they still carry about with them a mass of indwelling corruption, a body of sin. Paul speaks of this when he says, "I find a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind." (Rom. 7:21-23.) The experience of all true Christians in every age confirms this. They find within, two contrary principles, and a continual strife between the two. To these two principles our Lord alludes when He addresses

His half-awakened disciples. He calls the one flesh and the other spirit. He says, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

But does our Lord excuse this weakness of His disciples? Be it far from us to think so. Those who draw this conclusion mistake His meaning. He uses that very weakness as an argument for watchfulness and prayer. He teaches us that the very fact that we are encompassed with infirmity, should stir us up continually to "watch and pray."

If we know anything of true religion, let us never forget this lesson. If we desire to walk with God comfortably, and not fall, like David or Peter, let us never forget to watch and pray. Let us live like men on enemy's ground, and be always on our guard. We cannot walk too carefully. We cannot be too jealous over our souls. The world is very ensnaring. The devil is very busy. Let our Lord's words ring in our ears daily like a trumpet. Our spirits may sometimes be very willing. But our flesh is always very weak. Then let us always watch and always pray.

MATTHEW 26:47-56

While he was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he who betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, "Whoever I kiss, he is the one. Seize him." Immediately he came to Jesus, and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

Jesus said to him, "Friend, why are you here?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. Behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take the sword will die by the sword. Or do you think that I couldn't ask my Father, and he would even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so?"

In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching, and you didn't arrest me. But all this has happened, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."

Then all the disciples left him, and fled.

We see in these verses the cup of our Lord Jesus Christ's sufferings beginning to be filled. We see Him betrayed by one of His disciples, forsaken by the rest, and taken prisoner by His deadly enemies. Never surely was there sorrow like His sorrow! Never may we forget, as we read this part of the Bible, that our sins were the cause of these sorrows! Jesus was "delivered for our offences." (Rom. 4:25.)

Let us notice, for one thing, in these verses, what gracious condescension marked our Lord's communion with His disciples.

We have this point proved by a deeply touching circumstance at the moment of our Lord's betrayal. When Judas Iscariot undertook to guide the multitude to the place where his Master was, he gave them a sign by which they might distinguish Jesus in the dim moonlight from his disciples. He said, "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he." And so, when he came to Jesus, he said, "Hail! master, and kissed him." That simple fact reveals the affectionate terms on which the disciples associated with our Lord. It is an universal custom in Eastern countries, when friend meets friend, to salute one another with a kiss. (Exod. 18:7; 1 Sam. 20:41.) It would seem therefore, that when Judas kissed our Lord, he only did that which all the apostles were accustomed to do, when they met their Master after an absence.

Let us draw comfort from this little circumstance for our own souls. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a most gracious and condescending Savior. He is not an "austere man," repelling sinners, and keeping them at a distance. He is not a being so different from us in nature, that we must regard Him with awe rather than affection. He would have us rather regard Him as an elder Brother, and a beloved Friend. His heart in heaven is still the same that it was upon earth. He is ever meek, merciful, and condescending to men of low estate. Let us trust Him and not be afraid.

Let us notice for another thing, how our Lord condemns those who think to use carnal weapons in defence of Him and His cause. He reproves one of His disciples for striking a servant of the high priest. He bids him "put up his sword into his place." And he adds a solemn declaration of perpetual significance, "all those who take the sword shall perish by the sword."

The sword has a lawful office of its own. It may be used righteously in the defence of nations against oppression. It may become positively necessary to use it, to prevent confusion, plunder, and rapine upon earth. But the sword is not to be used in the propagation and maintenance of the Gospel. Christianity is not to be enforced by bloodshed, and belief in it extorted by force. Happy would it

have been for the Church if this sentence had been more frequently remembered! There are few countries in Christendom, where the mistake has not been made of attempting to change men's religious opinions by compulsion, penalties, imprisonment, and death. And with what effect? The pages of history supply an answer. No wars have been so bloody as those which have arisen out of the collision of religious opinions. Often, mournfully often, the very men who have been most forward to promote those wars, have themselves been slain. May we never forget this! The weapons of the Christian warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. (2 Cor.10:4.)

Let us notice for another thing, how our Lord submitted to be made a prisoner of His own free will. He was not taken captive because he could not escape. It would have been easy for Him to scatter His enemies to the winds, if he had thought fit. "Do you think," He says to a disciple, "that I cannot pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"

We see in those words the secret of His voluntary submission to His foes. He came on purpose to fulfil the types and promises of Old Testament Scriptures, and by fulfilling them to provide salvation for the world. He came intentionally to be the true Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb. He came to be the Scapegoat on whom the iniquities of the people were to be laid. His heart was set on accomplishing this great work. It could not be done without the "hiding of his power" for a time. To do it he became a willing sufferer. He was taken, tried, condemned, and crucified entirely of His own free will.

Let us observe this. There is much encouragement in it. The willing sufferer will surely be a willing Saviour. The almighty Son of God, who allowed men to bind Him and lead Him away captive, when He might have prevented them with a word, must surely be full of readiness to save the souls that flee to Him. Once more then let us learn to trust Him, and not be afraid.

Let us notice, in the last place, how little Christians know the weakness of their own hearts, until they are tried. We have a mournful illustration of this in the conduct of our Lord's apostles. The verses we have read conclude with the words, "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled." They forgot their confident assertions made a few hours before. They forgot that they had declared their willingness to die with their Master. They forgot everything but the danger that stared them in the face. The fear of death overcame them. They "forsook him, and fled."

How many professing Christians have done the same? How many, under the influence of excited feelings, have promised that they would never be ashamed of Christ! They have come away from the communion table, or the striking sermon, or the Christian meeting, full of zeal and love, and ready to say to all who caution them against backsliding, "Is your servant a dog that he should do this thing?" And yet in a few days these feelings have cooled down and passed away. A trial has come and they have fallen before it. They have forsaken Christ.

Let us learn from the passage lessons of humiliation and self-abasement. Let us resolve by God's grace to cultivate a spirit of lowliness, and self-distrust. Let us settle it in our minds, that there is nothing so bad that the best of us may not do it, unless he watches, prays, and is held up by the grace of God. And let it be one of our daily prayers, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe." (Psalm 119:117.)

Verses 57-68. The King before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin

MATTHEW 57-68

Those who had taken Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. But Peter followed him from a distance, to the court of the high priest, and entered in and sat with the officers, to see the end. Now the chief priests, the elders, and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus, that they might put him to death; and they found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward, and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.'"

The high priest stood up, and said to him, "Have you no answer? What is this that these testify against you?" But Jesus held his peace. The high priest answered him, "I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus said to him, "You have said it. Nevertheless, I tell you, after this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of the sky."

Then the high priest tore his clothing, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy. What do you think?"

They answered, "He is worthy of death!"

Then they spit in his face and beat him with their fists, and some slapped him, saying, "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who hit you?"

We read in these verses how our Lord Jesus Christ was brought before Caiaphas the high priest, and solemnly pronounced guilty. It was fitting that it should be so. The great day of atonement was come. The wondrous type of the scapegoat was about to be completely fulfilled. It was only suitable that the Jewish high priest should do his part, and declare sin to be upon the head of the victim, before he was led forth to be crucified. May we ponder these things and understand them. There was a deep meaning in every step of our Lord's passion.

Let us observe in these verses, that the chief priests were the principal agents in bringing about our Lord's death. It was not so much the Jewish people, we must remember, who pushed forward this wicked deed, as Caiaphas and his companions, the chief priests.

This is an instructive fact, and deserves notice. It is a clear proof that high ecclesiastical office exempts no man from gross errors in doctrine, and tremendous sins in practice. The Jewish priests could trace up their pedigree to Aaron, and were his lineal successors. Their office was one of peculiar sanctity, and entailed peculiar responsibilities. And yet these very men were the murderers of Christ!

Let us beware of regarding any minister of religion as infallible. His orders, however regularly conferred, are no guarantee that he may not lead us astray, and even ruin our souls. The teaching and conduct of all ministers must be tried by the Word of God. They are to be followed so long as they follow the Bible, but no longer. The maxim laid down in Isaiah must be our guide "To the law and the testimony--if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah. 8:20.)

Let us observe, in the second place, how fully our Lord declared to the Jewish council His own Messiahship, and His future coming in glory.

The unconverted Jew can never tell us at the present day, that his forefathers were left in ignorance that Jesus was the Messiah. Our Lord's answer to the solemn adjuration of the high priest is a sufficient reply. He tells the council plainly that He is "the Christ, the Son of God." He goes on to warn them that though He had not yet appeared in glory, as they expected Messiah would have done, a day would come when he would do so. "Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

They would yet see that very Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had arraigned at their bar, appear in all majesty as King of kings. (Rev. 1:7.)

It is a striking fact which we should not fail to notice, that almost the last word spoken by our Lord to the Jews, was a warning prediction about His own second advent. He tells them plainly that they would yet see Him in glory. No doubt he referred to the seventh chapter of Daniel, in the language that he used. But He spoke to deaf ears. Unbelief, prejudice, self-righteousness covered them like a thick cloud. Never was there such an instance of spiritual blindness. Well may the Church of England litany contain the prayer, "From all blindness--and from hardness of heart, good Lord deliver us."

Let us observe, in the last place, how much our Lord endured before the council, from false witness and mockery.

Falsehood and ridicule are old and favorite weapons of the devil. "He is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44.) All through our Lord's earthly ministry we see these weapons continually employed against Him. He was called a glutton, a wine-bibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners. He was held up to contempt as a Samaritan. The closing scene of His life was only in keeping with all the past tenor of it. Satan stirred up his enemies to add insult to injury. No sooner was He pronounced guilty, than every sort of mean indignity was heaped upon Him. "They spit in his face, and buffeted him." "They smote him with the palms of their hands." They said, mockingly, "Prophesy unto us, you Christ, who is he that smote you?"

How wonderful and strange it all sounds! How wonderful that the Holy Son of God should have voluntarily submitted to such indignities, to redeem such miserable sinners as we are! How wonderful, not least, that every tittle of these insults was foretold seven hundred years before they were inflicted! Seven hundred years before, Isaiah had written down the words, "I hid not my face from shame and spitting." (Isaiah. 50:6.)

Let us draw from the passage one practical conclusion. Let it never surprise us, if we have to endure mockery, and ridicule, and false reports, because we belong to Christ. The disciple is not greater than His Master, nor the servant than His Lord. If lies and insults were heaped upon our Savior, we need not wonder if the same weapons are constantly used against His people. It is one of Satan's great devices to blacken the characters of godly men, and bring them into contempt. The lives of Luther, Cranmer, Calvin, and Wesley supply abundant examples of this. If we are ever called upon to suffer in this way, let us bear it patiently. We drink the same cup that was drunk by our beloved Lord. But there

is one great difference. At the worst, we only drink a few bitter drops. He drank the cup to the very dregs.

Verses 69-75. Peter’s denial

MATTHEW 26:69-75

Now Peter was sitting outside in the court, and a maid came to him, saying, "You were also with Jesus, the Galilean!"

But he denied it before them all, saying, "I don't know what you are talking about."

When he had gone out onto the porch, someone else saw him, and said to those who were there, "This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth."

Again he denied it with an oath, "I don't know the man."

After a little while those who stood by came and said to Peter, "Surely you are also one of them, for your speech makes you known."

Then he began to curse and to swear, "I don't know the man!"

Immediately the rooster crowed. Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." He went out and wept bitterly.

If the Gospel had been a mere invention of man, we would never have been told that one of its principal preachers was once so weak and erring, as to deny his Master.

The first thing that demands our notice, is the full nature of the sin of which Peter was guilty.

It was a great sin. We see a man, who had followed Christ for three years, and been forward in professing faith and love towards Him--a man who had received boundless mercies, and loving-kindness, and been treated by Christ as a familiar friend--we see this man denying three times that he knows Jesus! This was bad. It was sin committed under circumstances of great aggravation. Peter had been warned plainly of his danger, and had heard the warning. He had just been receiving the bread and wine at our Lord's hand, and declaring loudly that though he died with Him, he would not deny Him! This also was bad. It was a sin committed under apparently small provocation. Two weak women make the

remark that he was with Jesus. Those who stood by say, "Surely you are one of them." No threat seems to have been used. No violence seems to have been done. But it was enough to overthrow Peter's faith. He denies before all. He denies with an oath. He curses and swears. Truly it is a humbling picture!

Let us mark this history, and store it up in our minds. It teaches us plainly that the best of saints are only men, and men encompassed with many infirmities. A man may be converted to God, have faith, and hope, and love towards Christ, and yet be overtaken in a fault, and have dreadful falls. It shows us the necessity of humility. So long as we are in the body we are in danger. The flesh is weak, and the devil is active. We must never think, "I cannot fall." It points out to us the duty of charity towards erring saints. We must not set down men as graceless reprobates, because they occasionally stumble and err. We must remember Peter, and "restore them in the spirit of meekness." (Gal. 6:1.)

The second thing that demands our notice, is the series of steps by which Peter was led to deny his Lord.

These steps are mercifully recorded for our learning. The Spirit of God has taken care to have them written down for the perpetual benefit of the Church of Christ. Let us trace them out one by one.

The first step to Peter's fall was SELF-CONFIDENCE. He said, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will." The second step was INDOLENCE. His Master told him to watch and pray. Instead of doing so, he slept. The third step was cowardly COMPROMISING. Instead of keeping close to his Master, he first forsook him, and then "followed him afar off." The last step was NEEDLESS VENTURING INTO EVIL COMPANY. He went into the priest's palace, and "sat with the servants," like one of themselves. And then came the final fall, the cursing, the swearing, and the three-fold DENIAL. Startling as it appears, his heart had been preparing for it. It was the fruit of seeds which he himself had sown. "He ate the fruit of his own ways."

Let us remember this part of Peter's history. It is deeply instructive to all who profess and call themselves Christians. Great illnesses seldom attack the body, without a previous train of premonitory symptoms. Great falls seldom happen to a saint, without a previous course of secret backsliding. The church and the world are sometimes shocked by the sudden misconduct of some great professor of religion. Believers are discouraged and stumbled by it. The enemies of God rejoice and blaspheme. But if the truth could be known, the explanation of such cases would generally be found to have been private departure from God. Men fall in private, long before they fall in public. The tree falls with a

great crash, but the secret decay which accounts for it, is often not discovered until it is down on the ground.

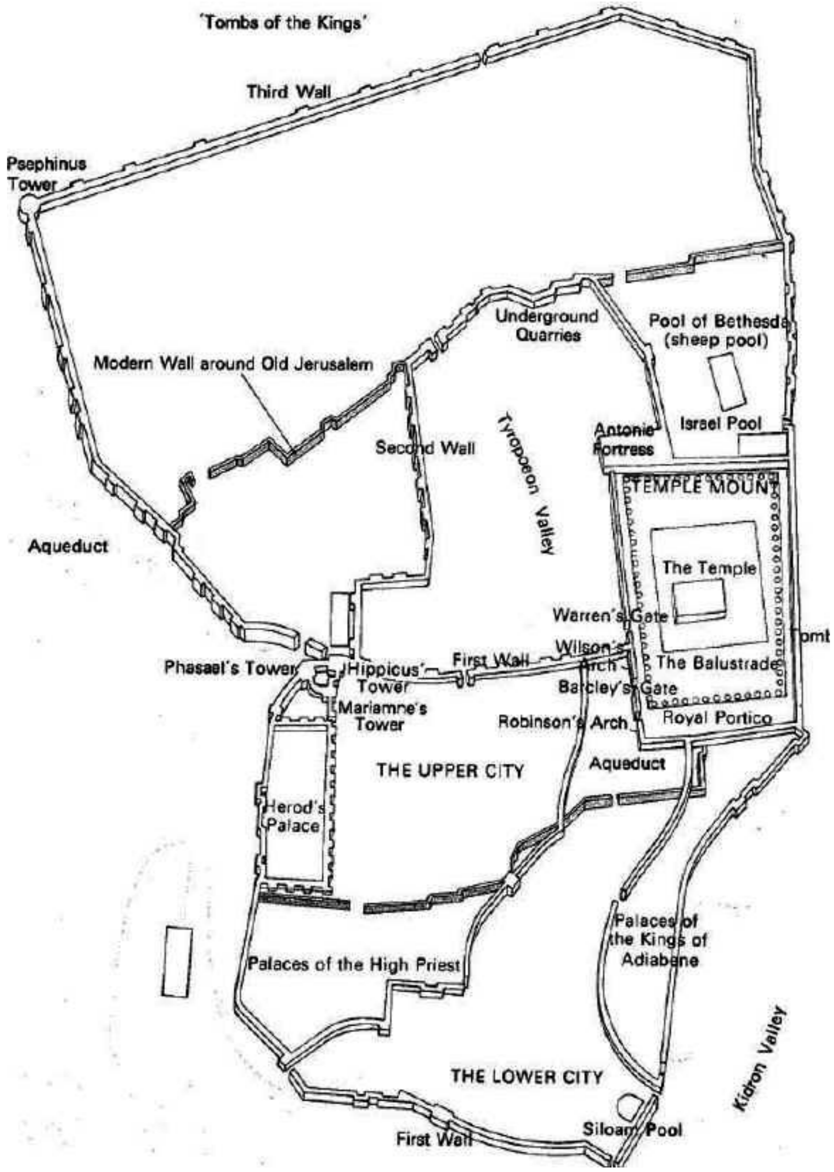
The last thing that demands our notice, is the sorrow which Peter's sin brought upon him. We read at the end of the chapter, "He went out and wept bitterly."

These words deserve more attention than they generally receive. Thousands have read the history of Peter's sin, who have thought little of Peter's tears, and Peter's repentance. May we have an eye to see, and a heart to understand.

We see in Peter's tears, the close connection between unhappiness and departure from God. It is a merciful arrangement of God, that in one sense holiness shall always be its own reward. A heavy heart, and an uneasy conscience, a clouded hope, and an abundant crop of doubts, will always be the consequence of backsliding and inconsistency. The words of Solomon describe the experience of many an inconsistent child of God, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." (Prov. 14:14.) Let it be a settled principle in our religion, that if we love inward peace, we must walk closely with God.

We see in Peter's bitter tears, the grand mark of difference between the hypocrite and the true believer. When the hypocrite is overtaken by sin, he generally falls to rise no more. He has no principle of life within him to raise him up. When the child of God is overtaken, he rises again by true repentance, and by the grace of God amends his life. Let no man flatter himself that he may sin with impunity, because David committed adultery, and because Peter denied his Lord. No doubt these holy men sinned greatly. But they did not continue in their sin. They repented greatly. They mourned over their falls. They loathed and abhorred their own wickedness. Well would it be for many, if they would imitate them in their repentance, as well as in their sins. Too many are acquainted with their fall, but not with their recovery. Like David and Peter, they have sinned, but they have not, like David and Peter, repented.

The whole passage is full of lessons that ought never to be forgotten. Do we profess to have a hope in Christ? Let us mark the weakness of a believer, and the steps that lead to a fall. Have we unhappily backslidden, and left our first love? Let us remember that the Saviour of Peter still lives. There is mercy for us as well as for him. But we must repent, and seek that mercy, if we would find it. Let us turn unto God, and He will turn to us. His compassions fail not. (Lam. 3:22.)



Jerusalem in the time of Herod the Great

Chapter 27

27.The trial and death of the rejected king

Verses 1-32. Jesus before Pilate

MATTHEW 27:1-10

Now when morning had come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death--and they bound him, and

led him away, and delivered him up to Pontius Pilate, the governor. Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, felt remorse, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood."

But they said, "What is that to us? You see to it."

He threw down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and departed. He went away and hanged himself. The chief priests took the pieces of silver, and said, "It's not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood." They took counsel, and bought the potter's field with them, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field was called "The Field of Blood" to this day. Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him upon whom a price had been set, whom some of the children of Israel priced, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

The opening of this chapter describes the delivery of our Lord Jesus Christ into the hands of the Gentiles. The chief priests and elders of the Jews led Him away to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. We may see in this incident the finger of God. It was ordered by His providence, that Gentiles as well as Jews should be concerned in the murder of Christ. It was ordered by His providence, that the priests should publicly confess that the "scepter had departed from Judah." They were unable to put any one to death, without going to the Romans. The words of Jacob were therefore fulfilled. The Messiah, "Shiloh, had indeed come." (Gen. 49:10.)

The subject that principally occupies the verses we have read, is the melancholy end of the false apostle, Judas Iscariot. It is a subject full of instruction. Let us mark well what it contains.

We see in the end of Judas a plain proof of our Lord's innocence of every charge laid against Him.

If there was any living witness who could give evidence against our Lord Jesus Christ, Judas Iscariot was the man. A chosen apostle of Jesus, a constant companion in all His journeyings, a hearer of all His teaching, both in public and private--he must have known if our Lord had done any wrong, either in word or deed. A deserter from our Lord's company, a betrayer of Him into the hands of His enemies, it was his interest for his own character's sake, to prove Jesus guilty. It would extenuate and excuse his own conduct, if he could make out that His former master was an offender, and an impostor.

Why then did not Judas Iscariot come forward? Why did he not stand forth before the Jewish council, and specify his charges, if he had any to make? Why did he not venture to accompany the chief priests to Pilate, and prove to the Romans that Jesus was a malefactor? There is but one answer to these questions. Judas did not come forward as a witness, because his conscience would not let him. Bad as he was, he knew he could prove nothing against Christ. Wicked as he was, he knew well that his Master was holy, harmless, innocent, blameless, and true. Let this never be forgotten. The absence of Judas Iscariot at our Lord's trial, is one among many proofs that the Lamb of God was without blemish--a sinless man.

We see, for another thing, in the end of Judas, that there is such a thing as repentance which is too late. We are told plainly that "Judas was filled with remorse. So he took the thirty pieces of silver back to the leading priests and other leaders." We are even told that he went to the priests, and said, "I have sinned." And yet it is clear that he did not repent unto salvation.

This is a point which deserves special attention. It is a common saying, "that it is never too late to repent." The saying, no doubt, is true, if repentance be true; but unhappily late repentance is often not genuine. It is possible for a man to feel his sins, and be sorry for them--to be under strong convictions of guilt, and express deep remorse--to be pierced in conscience, and exhibit much distress of mind--and yet, for all this, not repent with his heart. Present danger, or the fear of death, may account for all his feelings, and the Holy Spirit may have done no work whatever in his soul.

Let us beware of trusting to a late repentance. "Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation." ONE penitent thief was saved in the hour of death, that no man might despair, but ONLY ONE, that no man might presume. Let us put off nothing that concerns our souls, and above all not put off repentance, under the vain idea that it is a thing in our own power. The words of Solomon on this subject are very fearful. "I will not answer when they cry for help. Even though they anxiously search for me, they will not find me." (Prov. 1:28.)

Let us see, for another thing, in the end of Judas, how little comfort ungodliness brings a man at the last.

We are told that he cast down the thirty pieces of silver for which he had sold his Master, in the temple, and went away in bitterness of soul. That money was dearly earned. It brought him no pleasure, even when he had it. The "treasures of wickedness profit nothing." (Prov. 10:2.)

Sin is, in truth, the hardest of all masters. In its service there is plenty of fair promises, but an utter dearth of performance. Its pleasures are but for a season. Its wages are sorrow, remorse, self-accusation, and too often death. Those who sow to the flesh, do indeed reap corruption.

Are we tempted to commit sin? Let us remember the words of Scripture, "Your sin will find you out," and resist the temptation. Let us be sure that sooner or later, in this life or in the life to come, in this world or in the judgment-day, sin and the sinner will meet face to face, and have a bitter reckoning. Let us be sure that of all trades, sin is the most unprofitable. Judas, Achan, Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira, all found it so to their cost. Well might Paul say, "What fruit had you in those things whereof you are now ashamed?" (Rom. 6:21.)

Finally, let us see in the case of Judas, to what a miserable end a man may come, if he has great privileges, and does not use them rightly. We are told that this unhappy man "departed and went and hanged himself." What an dreadful death to die! An apostle of Christ, a former preacher of the Gospel, a companion of Peter and John, commits suicide, and rushes into God's presence unprepared and unforgiven.

Let us never forget that no sinners are so sinful as sinners against light and knowledge. None are so provoking to God. None, if we look at Scripture, have been so often removed from this world by sudden and fearful visitations. Let us remember Lot's wife, Pharaoh, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and Saul king of Israel. They are all cases in point. It is a solemn saying of Bunyan, "that none fall so deep into the pit, as those who fall backward." It is written in Proverbs, "he that being often reproved hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." (Prov. 29:1.) May we all strive to live up to our light. There is such a thing as sin against the Holy Spirit. Clear knowledge of truth in the head, combined with deliberate love of sin in the heart, go a long way towards it.

And now what is the state of our hearts? Are we ever tempted to rest on our knowledge and profession of religion? Let us remember Judas and beware. Are we disposed to cling to the world, and give money a prominent place in our minds? Again, let us remember Judas, and beware. Are we trifling with any one sin, and flattering ourselves we may repent by and bye? Once more, let us remember Judas and beware. He is set up before us as a beacon. Let us look well at him, and not make shipwreck.

MATTHEW 27:11-26

Now Jesus stood before the governor--and the governor asked him, saying, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus said to him, "Yes, it is as you say."

When he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then Pilate said to him, "Don't you hear how many things they testify against you?"

He gave him no answer, not even one word, so that the governor marveled greatly. Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the multitude one prisoner, whom they desired. They had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ?" For he knew that because of envy they had delivered him up.

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. But the governor answered them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?"

They said, "Barabbas!"

Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do to Jesus, who is called Christ?"

They all said to him, "Let him be crucified!"

But the governor said, "Why? What evil has he done?"

But they cried out exceedingly, saying, "Let him be crucified!"

So when Pilate saw that nothing was being gained, but rather that a disturbance was starting, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person. You see to it."

All the people answered, "May his blood be on us, and on our children!"

Then he released to them Barabbas, but Jesus he flogged and delivered to be crucified.

These verses describe our Lord's appearance before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. That sight must have been astonishing to the angels of God. He who will one day judge the world allowed himself to be judged and condemned, though "he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." (Isaiah 53:9.) He from whose lips Pilate and Caiaphas will one day receive their eternal sentence, suffered silently an unjust sentence to be passed upon him. Those silent sufferings fulfilled the words of Isaiah, "as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he opens not his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7.) To those silent sufferings believers owe all their peace and hope. Through them they will have boldness in the Day of Judgment, who in themselves would have nothing to say.

Let us learn from the conduct of Pilate, how pitiful is the condition of an unprincipled great man.

Pilate appears to have been inwardly satisfied that our Lord had done nothing worthy of death. We are told distinctly, "that he knew that for ENVY they had delivered him." Left to the exercise of his own unbiased judgment, he would probably have dismissed the charges against our Lord, and let Him go free.

But Pilate was governor of a jealous and turbulent people. His great desire was to procure favour with them and please them. He cared little how much he sinned against God and conscience, so long as he had the praise of man. Though willing to save our Lord's life, he was afraid to do it, if it offended the Jews. And so, after a feeble attempt to divert the fury of the people from Jesus to Barabbas--and a feebler attempt to satisfy his own conscience, by washing his hands publicly before the people--he at last condemned one whom he himself called "a just person." He rejected the strange and mysterious warning which his wife sent to him after her dream. He stifled the remonstrances of his own conscience. He "delivered Jesus to be crucified."

Behold in this miserable man a lively emblem of many a ruler of this world! How many there are, who know well that their public acts are wrong, and yet have not the courage to act up to their knowledge. They fear the people! They dread being laughed at! They cannot bear being unpopular! Like dead fish, they float with the tide. The praise of man is the idol before which they bow down, and to that idol they sacrifice conscience, inward peace, and an immortal soul.

Whatever our position in life may be, let us seek to be guided by principle, and not by expediency. The praise of man is a poor, feeble, uncertain thing. It is here today, and gone tomorrow. Let us strive to please God, and then we may

care little who else is pleased. Let us fear God, and then there is none else of whom we need be afraid.

Let us learn from the conduct of the Jews described in these verses, the desperate wickedness of human nature.

The behaviour of Pilate afforded the chief priests and elders an occasion of reconsidering what they were about. The difficulties he raised about condemning our Lord, gave time for second thoughts. But there were no second thoughts in the minds of our Lord's enemies. They pressed on their wicked deed. They rejected the compromise that Pilate offered. They actually preferred having a wretched felon, named Barabbas, set at liberty rather than Jesus. They clamoured loudly for our Lord's crucifixion. And they wound up all by recklessly taking on themselves all the guilt of our Lord's death, in words of portentous meaning, "His blood be on us and our children."

And what had our Lord done, that the Jews should hate Him so? He was no robber, or murderer. He was no blasphemer of their God, or reviler of their prophets. He was one whose life was love. He was one who "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." (Acts 10:38.) He was innocent of any transgression against the law of God or man. And yet the Jews hated Him, and never rested until He was slain! They hated Him, because He told them the truth. They hated Him, because He testified of their works that they were evil. They hated the light, because it made their own darkness visible. In a word, they hated Christ, because He was righteous and they were wicked, because He was holy and they were unholy--because He testified against sin, and they were determined to keep their sins and not let them go.

Let us observe this. There are few things so little believed and realized as the corruption of human nature. Men imagine that if they saw a perfect person, they would love and admire him. They flatter themselves that it is the inconsistency of professing Christians which they dislike, and not their religion. They forget that when a really perfect man was on earth, in the person of the Son of God, He was hated and put to death. That single fact goes far to prove the truth of Edwards' remark--"unconverted men would kill God, if they could get at Him."

Let us never be surprised at the wickedness there is in the world. Let us mourn over it, and labour to make it less, but let us never be surprised at its extent. There is nothing which the heart of man is not capable of conceiving, or the hand of man of doing. As long as we live, let us mistrust our own hearts. Even when renewed by the Spirit, they are still "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9.)

Verses 33-44. The crucifixion of the King

MATTHEW 27:27-44

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered the whole garrison together against him. They stripped him, and put a scarlet robe on him. They braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spit on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. When they had mocked him, they took the robe off of him, and put his clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, and they compelled him to go with them, that he might carry his cross. They came to a place called "Golgotha," that is to say, "The place of a skull." They gave him sour wine to drink mixed with gall. When he had tasted it, he would not drink. When they had crucified him, they divided his clothing among them, casting lots, and they sat and watched him there. They set up over his head the accusation against him written, "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Then there were two robbers crucified with him, one on his right hand and one on the left. Those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads, and saying, "You who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

Likewise the chief priests also mocking, with the scribes, the Pharisees, and the elders, said, "He saved others, but he can't save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" The robbers also who were crucified with him cast on him the same reproach.

These verses describe the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ after his condemnation by Pilate--His sufferings in the hands of the brutal Roman soldiers, and His final sufferings on the cross. They form a marvellous record.

They are marvellous when we remember who the sufferer is--the eternal Son of God! They are marvellous when we remember the people for whom these sufferings were endured. We and our sins were the cause of all this sorrow. He "died for our sins." (1 Cor. 15:3.)

Let us observe in the first place, the extent and reality of our Lord's sufferings.

The catalogue of all the pains endured by our Lord's body, is indeed a fearful one. Seldom has such suffering been inflicted on one body in the last few hours of a life. The most savage tribes, in their refinement of cruelty, could not have heaped more agonizing tortures on an enemy than were accumulated on the flesh and bones of our beloved Master. Never let it be forgotten that He had a real human body, a body exactly like our own, just as sensitive, just as vulnerable, just as capable of feeling intense pain. And then let us see what that body endured.

Our Lord, we must remember, had already passed a night without sleep, and endured excessive fatigue. He had been taken from Gethsemane to the Jewish council and from the council to Pilate's judgment hall. He had been twice placed on his trial, and twice unjustly condemned. He had been already scourged and beaten cruelly with rods. And now, after all this suffering He was delivered up to the Roman soldiers, a body of men no doubt expert in cruelty, and of all people least likely to behave with delicacy or compassion. Then harsh men at once proceeded to work their will. They "gathered together the whole band." They stripped our Lord of His clothing, and put on Him, in mockery, a scarlet robe. They platted a crown of sharp thorns, and in derision placed it on His head. They then bowed the knee before Him in mockery, as nothing better than a pretended king. They spit upon Him. They smote Him on the head. And finally having put His own robe on Him, they led Him out of the city, to a place called Golgotha, and there crucified Him between two thieves.

But what was a crucifixion? Let us try to realize it, and understand its misery. The person crucified was laid on his back on a piece of timber, with a cross-piece nailed to it near one end--or on the trunk of a tree with branching arms, which answered the same purpose. His hands were spread out on the cross-piece, and nails driven through each of them, fastening them to the wood. His feet in like manner were nailed to the upright part of the cross. And then, the body having been securely fastened, the cross was raised up, and fixed firmly in the ground. And there hung the unhappy sufferer until pain and exhaustion brought him to his end--not dying suddenly, for no vital part of him was injured--but enduring the most excruciating agony from his hands and feet, and unable to move. Such was the death of the cross. Such was the death that Jesus died for us! For six long hours He hung there before a gazing crowd, naked, and bleeding from head to foot--His head pierced with thorns--His back lacerated with scourging--His hands and feet torn with nails--and mocked and reviled by His cruel enemies to the very last.

Let us meditate frequently on these things. Let us often read over the story of Christ's cross and passion. Let us remember, not least, that all these horrible

sufferings were borne without a murmur. No word of impatience crossed our Lord's lips. In His death, no less than in His life, He was perfect. To the very last, Satan found nothing in Him. (John 14:30.)

Let us observe, in the second place, that all our Lord Jesus Christ's sufferings were vicarious. He suffered not for His own sins, but for ours. He was eminently our substitute in all His passion.

This is a truth of the deepest importance. Without it the story of our Lord's sufferings, with all its minute details, must always seem mysterious and inexplicable. It is a truth, however, of which the Scriptures speak frequently, and that too with no uncertain sound. We are told that Christ "bore our sins in His own body on the tree,"--that He "suffered for sin, the just for the unjust,"--that "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,"--that "He was made a curse for us,"--that "He was offered to bear the sins of many,"--that "He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities,"--and that "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (1 Peter 2:22, and 3:18. 2 Cor. 5:21. Gal. 3:13. Heb. 9:28. Isaiah 53:5, 6.) May we all remember these texts well. They are among the foundation stones of the Gospel.

But we must not be content with a vague general belief, that Christ's sufferings on the cross were vicarious. We are intended to see this truth in every part of His passion. We may follow Him all through, from the bar of Pilate, to the minute of His death, and see him at every step as our mighty Substitute, our Representative, our Head, our Surety, our Proxy--the Divine Friend who undertook to stand in our stead, and by the priceless merit of His sufferings, to purchase our redemption. Was He scourged? It was that "through His stripes we might be healed." Was he condemned, though innocent? It was that we might be acquitted though guilty. Did He wear a crown of thorns? It was that we might wear the crown of glory. Was He stripped of His clothing? It was that we might be clothed in everlasting righteousness. Was he mocked and reviled? It was that we might be honoured and blessed. Was He reckoned a malefactor, and numbered among transgressors? It was that we might be reckoned innocent, and justified from all sin. Was he declared unable to save Himself? It was that He might be able to save others to the uttermost. Did He die at last, and that the most painful and disgraceful of deaths? It was that we might live for evermore, and be exalted to the highest glory. Let us ponder these things well. They are worth remembering. The very key to peace is a right apprehension of the vicarious sufferings of Christ.

Let us leave the story of our Lord's passion with feelings of deep thankfulness. Our sins are many and great. But a great atonement has been made for them. There was an infinite merit in all Christ's sufferings. They were the sufferings of One who was God as well as man. Surely it is fit, right, and our bounden duty, to praise God daily because Christ has died.

Last, but not least, let us ever learn from the story of the passion, to hate sin with a great hatred. Sin was the cause of all our Saviour’s suffering. Our sins platted the crown of thorns. Our sins drove the nails into His hands and feet. On account of our sins His blood was shed. Surely the thought of Christ crucified should make us loathe all sin. Well says the Homily of the Passion, "Let this image of Christ crucified be always printed in our hearts. Let it stir us up to the hatred of sin, and provoke our minds to the earnest love of Almighty God."

Verses 45-50. The death of the King

Verses 51-56. The end of the legal age

MATTHEW 27:45-56

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani?" That is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Some of them who stood there, when they heard it, said, "This man is calling Elijah."

Immediately one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him a drink. The rest said, "Let him be. Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him."

Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared to many. Now the centurion, and those who were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Many women were there watching from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

In these verses we read the conclusion of our Lord Jesus Christ's passion. After six hours of agonizing suffering, He became obedient even unto death, and "yielded up the spirit." Three points in the narrative demand a special notice. To them let us confine our attention.

Let us observe, in the first place, the remarkable words which Jesus uttered shortly before His death, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

There is a deep mystery in these words, which no mortal man can fathom. No doubt they were not wrung from our Lord by mere bodily pain. Such an explanation His utterly unsatisfactory, and dishonourable to our blessed Saviour. They were meant to express the real pressure on His soul of the enormous burden of a world's sins. They were meant to show how truly and literally He was our substitute, was made sin, and a curse for us, and endured God's righteous anger against a world's sin in His own person. At that dreadful moment, the iniquity of us all was laid upon Him to the uttermost. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and put Him to grief. (Isaiah 53:10.) He bore our sins. He carried our transgressions. Heavy must have been that burden, real and literal must have been our Lord's substitution for us, when He, the eternal Son of God, could speak of Himself as for a time "forsaken."

Let the expression sink down into our hearts, and not be forgotten. We can have no stronger proof of the sinfulness of sin, or of the vicarious nature of Christ's sufferings, than His cry, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" It is a cry that should stir us up to hate sin, and encourage us to trust in Christ.

Let us observe, in the second place, how much is contained in the words which describe our Lord's end. We are simply told, "He yielded up His spirit."

There never was a last breath drawn, of such deep import as this. There never was an event on which so much depended. The Roman soldiers, and the gaping crowd around the cross, saw nothing remarkable. They only saw a person dying as others die, with all the usual agony and suffering, which attend a crucifixion. But they knew nothing of the eternal interests which were involved in the whole transaction.

That death discharged in full the mighty debt which sinners owe to God, and threw open the door of life to every believer. That death satisfied the righteous claims of God's holy law, and enabled God to be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. That death was no mere example of self-sacrifice, but a complete atonement and propitiation for man's sin, affecting the condition and prospects

of all mankind. That death solved the hard problem, how God could be perfectly holy, and yet perfectly merciful. It opened to the world a fountain for all sin and uncleanness. It was a complete victory over Satan, and spoiled him openly. It finished the transgression, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness. It proved the sinfulness of sin, when it needed such a sacrifice to atone for it. It proved the love of God to sinners, when He sent His own Son to make the atonement. Never, in fact, was there, or could there be again, such a death. No wonder that the earth quaked, when Jesus died, in our stead, on the accursed tree. The solid frame of the world might well tremble and be amazed, when the soul of Christ was made an offering for sin. (Isaiah 53:10.)

Let us observe, in the last place, what a remarkable miracle occurred at the hour of our Lord's death, in the very midst of the Jewish temple. We are told that "the veil of the temple was rent in two." The curtain which separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple, and through which the high priest alone might pass, was split from top to bottom.

Of all the wonderful signs which accompanied our Lord's death, none was more significant than this. The mid-day darkness for three hours, must have been a startling event. The earthquake, which rent the rocks, must have been a tremendous shock. But there was a meaning in the sudden rending of the veil from top to bottom, which must have pierced the heart of any intelligent Jew. The conscience of Caiaphas, the high priest, must have been hard indeed, if the tidings of that rent veil did not fill him with dismay.

The rending of the veil proclaimed the termination and passing away of the ceremonial law. It was a sign that the old dispensation of sacrifices and ordinances was no longer needed. Its work was done. Its occupation was gone, from the moment that Christ died. There was no more need of an earthly high priest, and a mercy seat, and a sprinkling of blood, and an offering up of incense, and a day of atonement. The true High Priest had at length appeared. The true Lamb of God had been slain. The true mercy seat was at length revealed. The figures and shadows were no longer needed. May we all remember this! To set up an altar, and a sacrifice, and a priesthood now, is to light a candle at noon-day.

That rending of the veil proclaimed the opening of the way of salvation to all mankind. The way into the presence of God was unknown to the Gentile, and only seen dimly by the Jew, until Christ died. But Christ having now offered up a perfect sacrifice, and obtained eternal redemption, the darkness and mystery were to pass away. All were to be invited now to draw near to God with boldness, and approach Him with confidence, by faith in Jesus. A door was

thrown open, and a way of life set before the whole world. May we all remember this! From the time that Jesus died, the way of peace was never meant to be shrouded in mystery. There was to be no reserve. The Gospel was the revelation of a mystery, which had been hidden from ages and generations. To clothe religion now with mystery is to mistake the grand characteristic of Christianity.

Let us turn from the story of the crucifixion, every time we read it, with hearts full of praise. Let us praise God for the confidence it gives us, as to the ground of our hope of pardon. Our sins may be many and great, but the payment made by our Great Substitute far outweighs them all. Let us praise God for the view it given us of the love of our Father in heaven. He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, will surely with Him give us all things. Not least, let us praise God for the view it gives us of the sympathy of Jesus with all His believing people. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows what suffering is. Jesus is just the Saviour that an infirm body, with a weak heart, in an evil world, requires.

Verses 57-66. The burial of the King

MATTHEW 27:57-66

When evening had come, a rich man from Arimathaea, named Joseph, who himself was also Jesus' disciple came. This man went to Pilate, and asked for Jesus' body. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given up. Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock, and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb. Now on the next day, which was the day after the Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver said while he was still alive--'After three days I will rise again.' Command therefore that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest perhaps his disciples come at night and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He is risen from the dead;' and the last deception will be worse than the first."

Pilate said to them, "You have a guard. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone.

These verses contain the history of our Lord Jesus Christ's burial. There was yet one thing needful, in order to make it certain that our Redeemer accomplished that great work of redemption which He undertook. That holy

body, in which He bore our sins on the cross, must actually be laid in the grave, and rise again. His resurrection was to be the seal and head-stone of all the work.

The infinite wisdom of God foresaw the objections of unbelievers and infidels, and provided against them. Did the Son of God really die? Did he really rise again? Might there not have been some delusion as to the reality of His death? Might there not have been imposition or deception, as to the reality of His resurrection? All these, and many more objections, would doubtless have been raised, if opportunity had been given. But He who knows the end from the beginning, prevented the possibility of such objections being made. By His over-ruling providence, He ordered things so that the death and burial of Jesus were placed beyond a doubt. Pilate gives consent to His burial. A loving disciple wraps the body in linen, and lays it in a new tomb hewn out of a rock, "wherein was never man yet laid." The chief priests themselves set a guard over the place where His body was deposited. Jews and Gentiles, friends and enemies, all alike testify to the great fact, that Christ did really and actually die, and was laid in a grave. It is a fact that can never be questioned. He was really "bruised." He really "suffered." He really "died." He was really "buried." Let us mark this well. It deserves recollection.

Let us learn, for one thing, from these verses, that our Lord Jesus Christ has friends of whom little is known.

We cannot have a more striking example of this truth, than we see in the passage now before us. A man named Joseph of Arimathaea comes forward, when our Lord was dead, and asks permission to bury Him. We have never heard of this man at any former period of our Lord's earthly ministry. We never hear of him again. We know nothing, but that he was a disciple who loved Christ, and did Him honour. At the time when the apostles had forsaken our Lord--at a time when it was a dangerous thing to confess regard for Him--at a time when there seemed to be no earthly advantage to be gained by confessing His discipleship--at such a time as this Joseph comes boldly forward, and begs the body of Jesus, and lays it in his own new tomb.

This fact is full of comfort and encouragement. It shows us that there are some quiet, retiring souls on earth, who know the Lord, and the Lord knows them, and yet they are little known by the church. It shows us that there are diversities of gifts among Christ's people. There are some who glorify Christ passively, and some who glorify Him actively. There are some whose vocation it is to build the Church, and fill a public place, and there are some who only come

forward, like Joseph, in times of special need. But each and all are led by one Spirit, and each and all glorify God in their several ways.

Let these things teach us to be more hopeful. Let us believe that many shall yet come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. There may be in some dark corners of Christendom many, who, like Simeon, and Anna, and Joseph of Arimathaea, are at present little known, who shall shine brightly among the Lord's jewels in the day of His appearing.

Let us learn, for another thing, from these verses, that God can make the devices of wicked men work to His own glory.

We are taught that lesson in a striking manner, by the conduct of the priests and Pharisees, after our Lord was buried. The restless enmity of these unhappy men could not sleep, even when the body of Jesus was in the grave. They called to mind the words, which they remembered he had said, about "rising again." They resolved, as they thought, to make His rising again impossible. They went to Pilate. They obtained from him a guard of Roman soldiers. They set a watch over the tomb of our Lord. They placed a seal upon the stone. In short, they did all they could to "make the sepulchre sure."

They little thought what they were doing. They little thought that unwittingly they were providing the most complete evidence of the truth of Christ's coming resurrection. They were actually making it impossible to prove that there was any deception or imposition. Their seal, their guard, their precautions, were all to become witnesses, in a few hours, that Christ had risen. They might as well have tried to stop the tides of the sea, or to prevent the sun rising, as to prevent Jesus coming forth from the tomb. They were taken in their own craftiness. (1 Cor. 3:19.) Their own devices became instruments to show forth God's glory.

The history of the Church of Christ is full of examples of a similar kind. The very things that have seemed most unfavourable to God's people, have often turned out to be for their good. What harm did the "persecution which arose about Stephen" do to the Church of Christ? Those who were scattered went every where, preaching the word. (Acts 8:4.) What harm did imprisonment do Paul? It gave him time to write many of those Epistles, which are now read all over the world. What real harm did the persecution of bloody Mary do to the cause of the English Reformation? The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. What harm does persecution do the people of God at this very day? It only drives them nearer to Christ. It only makes them cling more closely to the throne of grace, the Bible, and prayer.

Let all true Christians lay these things to heart, and take courage. We live in a world where all things are ordered by a hand of perfect wisdom, and where all things are working together continually for the good of the body of Christ. The powers of this world are only tools in the hand of God. He is ever using them for His own purposes, however little they may be aware of it. They are the instruments by which He is ever squaring and polishing the living stones of His spiritual temple, and all their schemes and plans will only turn to His praise. Let us be patient in the days of trouble and darkness, and look forward. The very things which now seem against us, are all working together for God's glory. We see but half now. Yet in a little while, we shall see all. And we shall then discover that all the persecution we now endure was, like the seal and the guard, tending to God's glory. God can make the "wrath of man praise him." (Psalm 76:10.)



The Hinnom Valley, Jerusalem

Chapter 28

28.The resurrection of the rejected King

MATTHEW 28:1-10

Verses 1-10. The resurrection

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. Behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from the sky, and came and rolled away the stone from the door, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him, the guards shook, and became like dead men. The angel answered the women, "Don't be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying. Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead, and behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you."

They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!"

They came and took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go tell my brothers that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see me."

The principal subject of these verses is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. It is one of those truths which lie at the very foundation of Christianity, and has therefore received special attention in the four Gospels. All four evangelists describe minutely how our Lord was crucified. All four relate with no less clearness, that He rose again.

We need not wonder that so much importance is attached to our Lord's resurrection. It is the seal and headstone of the great work of redemption, which He came to do. It is the crowning proof that He has paid the debt which He undertook to pay on our behalf, won the battle which He fought to deliver us from hell, and is accepted as our Surety and our Substitute by our Father in heaven. Had He never come forth from the prison of the grave, how could we ever have been sure that our ransom had been fully paid? (1 Cor. 15:17.) Had He never risen from His conflict with the last enemy, how could we have felt confident, that He has overcome death, and him that had the power of death, that

is the devil? (Heb. 2:14.) But thanks be unto God, we are not left in doubt. The Lord Jesus really "rose again for our justification." True Christians are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." They may boldly say with Paul, "Who is he that condemns--it is Christ that died, yes rather that is risen again." (Rom. 8:34. Rom. 4:25. 1 Peter 1:3.)



Gordon's Calvary, Jerusalem

We have reason to be very thankful, that this wonderful truth of our religion is so clearly and fully proved. It is a striking circumstance, that of all the facts of out Lord's earthly ministry, none are so incontrovertibly established as the fact that He rose again. The wisdom of God, who knows the unbelief of human nature, has provided a great cloud of witnesses on the subject. Never was there a fact which the friends of God were so slow to believe, as the resurrection of Christ. Never was there a fact which the enemies of God were so anxious to disprove. And yet, in spite of the unbelief of professed friends, and the enmity of foes, the fact was thoroughly established. Its evidences will always appear to a fair and impartial mind unanswerable. It would be impossible to prove anything in the world, if we refuse to believe that Jesus rose again.

Let us notice in these verses, the glory and majesty with which Christ rose from the dead. We are told that "there was a great earthquake." We are told that "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the

stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it." We need not suppose that our blessed Lord needed the help of any angel, when He came forth from the grave. We need not for a moment doubt that He rose again by His own power. But it pleased God, that His resurrection should be accompanied and followed by signs and wonders. It seemed good that the earth should shake, and a glorious angel appear, when the Son of God arose from the dead as a conqueror.

Let us not fail to see in the manner of our Lord's resurrection, a type and pledge of the resurrection of His believing people. The grave could not hold Him beyond the appointed time, and it shall not be able to hold them. A glorious angel was a witness of His rising, and glorious angels shall be the messengers who shall gather believers when they rise again. He rose with a renewed body, and yet a body, real, true, and material, and so also shall His people have a glorious body, and be like their Head. "When we see Him we shall be like Him." (1 John 3:2.)

Let us take comfort in this thought. Trial, sorrow, and persecution are often the portion of God's people. Sickness, weakness, and pain often hurt and wear their poor earthly body. But their good time is yet to come. Let them wait patiently, and they shall have a glorious resurrection. When we die, and where we are buried, and what kind of a funeral we have, matters little. The great question to be asked is this, "How shall we rise again?"

Let us notice in the next place, the terror which Christ's enemies felt at the period of His resurrection. We are told that at the sight of the angel, "the guards shook and became as dead men." Those hardy Roman soldiers, though not unused to dreadful sights, saw a sight which made them quail. Their courage melted at once at the appearance of one angel of God.

Let us again see in this fact, a type and emblem of things yet to come. What will the ungodly and the wicked do at the last day, when the trumpet shall sound, and Christ shall come in glory to judge the world? What will they do, when they see all the dead, both small and great, coming forth from their graves, and all the angels of God assembled round the great white throne? What fears and terrors will possess their souls, when they find they can no longer avoid God's presence, and must at length meet Him face to face? Oh! that men were wise, and would consider their latter end! Oh! that they would remember that there is a resurrection and a judgment, and that there is such a thing as the wrath of the Lamb!

Let us notice in the next place, the words of comfort which the angel addressed to the friends of Christ. We read that he said, "Fear not--for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified."

These words were spoken with a deep meaning. They were meant to cheer the hearts of believers in every age, in the prospect of the resurrection. They were intended to remind us, that true Christians have no cause for alarm, whatever may come on the world. The Lord shall appear in the clouds of heaven, and the earth be burned up. The graves shall give up the dead that are in them, and the last day come. The judgment shall be set, and the books shall be opened. The angels shall sift the wheat from the chaff, and divide between the good fish and the bad. But in all this there is nothing that need make believers afraid. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ, they shall be found without spot and blameless. Safe in the one true ark, they shall not be hurt when the flood of God's wrath breaks on the earth. Then shall the words of the Lord receive their complete fulfilment--"when these things begin to come to pass, lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near." Then shall the wicked and unbelieving see how true was that word, "blessed are the people whose God is the Lord." (Psalm 33:12.)

Let us notice, finally, the gracious message which the Lord sent to the disciples after His resurrection. He appeared in person to the women who had come to do honour to His body. Last at the cross and first at the tomb, they were the first privileged to see Him after He rose. And to them He gives commission to carry tidings to His disciples. His first thought is for His little scattered flock. "Go, tell my brethren."

There is something deeply touching in those simple words, "my brethren." They deserve a thousand thoughts. Weak, frail, erring as the disciples were, Jesus still calls them His "brethren." He comforts them, as Joseph did his brethren who had sold him, saying, "I am your brother Joseph." Much as they had come short of their profession--sadly as they had yielded to the fear of man, they are still His "brethren." Glorious as He was in Himself--a conqueror over death, and hell, and the grave, the Son of God is still "meek and lowly of heart." He calls His disciples "brethren."

Let us turn from the passage with comfortable thoughts, if we know anything of true religion. Let us see in these words of Christ, an encouragement to trust and not be afraid. Our Saviour is one who never forgets His people. He pities their infirmities. He does not despise them. He knows their weakness, and yet does not cast them away. Our great High Priest is also our elder brother.

Verses 11-15. The false report of the Jews

Verses 16-20. The great commission

MATTHEW 28:11-20

Now while they were going, behold, some of the guards came into the city, and told the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave a large amount of silver to the soldiers, saying, "Say that his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. If this report comes to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and make you free of worry." So they took the money and did as they were told. This saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continues until this day.

But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had sent them. When they saw him, they bowed down to him, but some doubted. Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Therefore go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

These verses form the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew. They begin by showing us what absurdities blind prejudice will believe, rather than believe the truth. They go on to show us what weakness there is in the hearts of some disciples, and how slow they are to believe. They finish by telling us some of the last words spoken by our Lord upon earth--words so remarkable that they demand and deserve all our attention.

Let us observe, in the first place, the honor which God has put on our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord says, "all power is given unto me, in heaven and earth."

This is a truth which is declared by Paul to the Philippians, "God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name." (Phil. 2:9.) It is a truth which in nowise takes away from the true notion of Christ's divinity, as some have ignorantly supposed. It is simply a declaration, that, in the counsels of the eternal Trinity, Jesus, as Son of man, is appointed heir of all things, that He is the Mediator between God and man--that the salvation of all who are saved is laid upon Him--and that He is the great fountain of mercy, grace, life, and peace. It was for this "joy set before Him that He endured the cross." (Heb. 12:2.)

Let us embrace this truth reverently, and cling to it firmly. Christ is He who has the keys of death and hell. Christ is the anointed Priest, who alone can absolve sinners. Christ is the fountain of living waters, in whom alone we can be cleansed. Christ is the Prince and Saviour, who alone can give repentance and remission of sins. In Him all fullness dwells. He is the way, the door, the light, the life, the Shepherd, the altar of refuge. He that has the Son has life--and he that has not the Son has not life. May we all strive to understand this. No doubt men may easily think too little of God the Father, and God the Spirit, but no man ever thought too much of Christ.

Let us observe, in the second place, the duty which Jesus lays on His disciples. He bids them "go and teach all nations." They were not to confine their knowledge to themselves, but communicate it to others. They were not to suppose that salvation was revealed only to the Jews, but to make it known to all the world. They were to strive to make disciples of all nations, and to tell the whole earth that Christ had died for sinners.

Let us never forget that this solemn injunction is still in full force. It is still the bounden duty of every disciple of Christ to do all he can in person, and by prayer, to make others acquainted with Jesus. Where is our faith, if we neglect this duty? Where is our charity? It may well be questioned whether a man knows the value of the Gospel himself, if he does not desire to make it known to all the world.

Let us observe, in the third place, the public profession which Jesus requires of those who believe His Gospel. He tells His apostles to "baptize" those whom they received as disciples.

It is very difficult to conceive when we read this last command of our Lord's, how men can avoid the conclusion that baptism is necessary, when it may be had. It seems impossible to explain the word that we have here of any but an outward ordinance, to be administered to all who join His Church. That outward baptism is not absolutely necessary to salvation, the case of the penitent thief plainly shows. He went to paradise unbaptized. That outward baptism alone often confers no benefit, the case of Simon Magus plainly shows. Although baptized, he remained "in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity." (Acts 8:23.) But that baptism is a matter of entire indifference, and need not be used at all, is an assertion which seems at variance with our Lord's words in this place.

The plain practical lesson of the words is the necessity of a public confession of faith in Christ. It is not enough to be a secret disciple. We must not be ashamed to let men see whose we are, and whom we serve. We must not behave

as if we did not like to be thought Christians, but take up our cross and confess our Master before the world. His words are very solemn, "Whoever shall be ashamed of me--of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father, with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38.)

Let us observe, in the fourth place, the obedience which Jesus requires of all who profess themselves His disciples. He bids the apostles "teach them to observe all things, whatever He has commanded them."

This is a searching expression. It shows the uselessness of a mere name and form of Christianity. It shows that they only are to be counted true Christians who live in a practical obedience to His word, and strive to do the things that He has commanded. The water of baptism, and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper alone will save no man's soul. It profits nothing that we go to a place of worship and hear Christ's ministers, and approve of the Gospel, if our religion goes no further than this. What are our lives? What is our daily conduct, at home and abroad? Is the Sermon on the Mount our rule and standard? Do we strive to copy Christ's example? Do we seek to do the things that He commanded? These are questions that must be answered in the affirmative, if we would prove ourselves born again and children of God. Obedience is the only proof of reality. Faith without works is dead, being alone. "You are my friends," says Jesus, "if you do whatever I command you." (John 15:14.)

Let us observe, in the fifth place, the solemn mention of the blessed Trinity which our Lord makes in these verses. He bids the apostles to baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

This is one of those great plain texts which directly teach the mighty doctrine of the Trinity. It speaks of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as Three distinct persons, and speaks of all Three as co-equal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. And yet these Three are One.

This truth is a great mystery. Let it be enough to receive and believe it, and let us ever abstain from all attempts at explanation. It is childish folly to refuse assent to things that we do not understand. We are poor crawling worms of a day, and at our best, know little about God and eternity. Suffice it for us to receive the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, with humility and reverence, and to ask no vain questions. Let us believe that no sinful soul could be saved without the work of all three Persons in the blessed Trinity, and let us rejoice that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who co-operated to make man, do always co-operate to save him. Here let us pause. We may receive practically what we cannot explain theoretically.

Finally, let us observe in these verses, the gracious promise with which Jesus closes His words. He says to His disciples "I am with you always even to the end of the world."

It is impossible to conceive words more comforting, strengthening, cheering, and sanctifying than these. Though left alone, like orphan children in a cold, unkind world, the disciples were not to think they were deserted. Their Master would be ever "with them." Though commissioned to do a work as hard as that of Moses when sent to Pharaoh, they were not to be discouraged. Their Master would certainly be "with them." No words could be more suited to the position of those to whom they were first spoken. No words could be imagined more consolatory to believers in every age of the world. Let all true Christians lay hold on these words and keep them in mind. Christ is "with us" always. Christ is "with us," wherever we go. He came to be "Emmanuel, God with us," when He first came into the world. He declares that He is ever Emmanuel, "with us," when He comes to the end of His earthly ministry and is about to leave the world. He is with us daily to pardon and forgive--with us daily to sanctify and strengthen--with us daily to defend and keep--with us daily to lead and to guide--with us in sorrow, and with us in joy--with us in sickness, and with us in health--with us in life, and with us in death--with us in time, and with us in eternity.

What stronger consolation could believers desire than this? Whatever happens, they at least are never completely friendless and alone. Christ is ever with them. They may look into the grave, and say with David, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me." They may look forward beyond the grave, and say with Paul, "we shall ever be with the Lord." (Psalm 23:4. 1 Thes. 4:17.) He has said it, and He will stand to it, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world." "I will never leave you and never forsake you." We could ask nothing more. Let us go on believing, and not be afraid. It is everything to be a real Christian. None have such a King, such a Priest, such a constant Companion, and such an unfailing Friend, as the true servants of Christ.

Matthew and Mark compared

The first two books of the New Testament are Matthew and Mark. Since the authors did not sign their work, we can only guess who they are. These two Gospels while different both tell the story of Jesus Christ in different ways because their intended audiences were and continue to be different.

When these Gospels were written it was not important for a writer to lay claim

to his work. Because of this neither of these books can be attributed to a particular person. The only information that we have about either writer we get from the clues they left us in the Gospels. By studying these two Gospels we can see that both writers were knowledgeable of the Scriptures of Israel. Because "it [Matthew] focuses largely around an interpretation of the meaning of the Torah," we can be relatively sure that this book was written by a Jewish writer for a Jewish audience. Mark's audience was most likely Gentile. Many of the differences that we find in these two books are due to their distinct audiences.

Matthew is the first book of the New Testament, however Mark was most likely written first. Matthew was originally placed first as it was thought to be the first Gospel to be written. This later changed as more research was done. It has since been concluded that "more than 95 percent of the Second Gospel appears also in Matthew or Luke of both." Because of this it is believed the writer of Matthew used Mark as a reference. Regardless of which was written first, "Introducing the New Testament" calls Matthew an "effective bridge within the Christian canon of Scripture – from the OT to the NT." It is believed that Matthew was written by either the disciple Matthew or more likely a scribe. Mark on the other hand is believed to have been written by either Peter's interpreter Mark or John Mark.

Matthew was written as a biography that included "a focus on Jesus' public life," with "an overall interpretive aim indicating the cause-and-effect relations among the events that make up the narrative, and a presentation of Jesus and his behaviour as exemplary for the Gospel's audience." While Matthew looks more at the "cause-and-effect relations," Mark is considered the most historical of the narratives of Jesus' ministry."

Matthew uses Jesus' life and teachings to appeal to the Jews. His use of the genealogy of Jesus is almost like saying that "we could not have the New Testament if it were not for the Old Testament and that Jesus would not be Jesus if it were not for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:17 that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it. Through His teaching he not only provided the earthly view of the law but took it another step into the spiritual implications. It was through Jesus' teaching that the Old Testament Scriptures were brought to life for the people to better understand. Matthew makes the point that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophesies.

Mark uses the events of Jesus' life to lead us up to his death and resurrection.

Mark's Christian audience would not have been familiar with Jewish traditions so the writer takes the time to explain them, something the writer of Matthew did not have to do. "Some of the most ancient authorities bring the book [Mark] to a close at the end of verse 8 [chapter 16]." This ends Mark immediately after Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome have gone to Jesus' tomb, found it empty, and been told to tell the disciples that Jesus has gone ahead to Galilee where they will again see him. This abrupt ending "provides a powerful way to end this Gospel – or, rather, to leave this story open-ended in a provocative way." Verses 9 through 20 were likely added later to give this Gospel closure.

Matthew and Mark show that Jesus is the Messiah that was prophesied in the Old Testament, that He was the Son of God who came as a man to live a sinless life who paid for our sins by dying on the cross. While Matthew begins with the birth and childhood of Jesus, Mark catches up with the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11). Matthew's (4:1-11) account of Jesus' temptation is more detailed than Mark's (1:13). Both Gospels tell their audience about the calling of the disciples (Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20). Even though their audiences were different both Gospels tell the story of the disciples picking grain to eat on the Sabbath and the resulting questioning that Jesus receives from the Pharisees (Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28). In both of these books Jesus heals a leper, cures a paralytic, and heals a man's hand on the Sabbath as well as many of the miracles. In addition to having the power to heal Jesus also had the power over nature. Jesus calms a stormy sea (Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:36-41) showing His command over nature. Jesus taught using parables including new wine in old wineskins (Matthew 9:17, Mark 2:22), the mustard seed (Matthew 12:31-32, Mark 4:30-32), and the fig tree (Matthew 24:32-44, Mark 13:28-32).

Just as the writers of Matthew and Mark had intended audiences so do I. For personal study I find that one book cannot stand without the other. Because of this I will use a comparison chart of the Gospels to get the most of my study time. If I am teaching those who do not know who Jesus is or only have a cursory knowledge of Him I start them with Matthew. I find Mark the better starting point when working with people who know who Jesus is, but are just beginning to study the Scriptures.



The sea of Galilee and the of the Beatitudes

The Gospel of Mark (1)

Introduction and Outline

The author

Mark was not one of the original twelve disciples. Nor was he an apostle. He is first introduced to us in Acts 12. Historically the time was A.D. 44. His home was in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 12:12,25). He came from a well-to-do family. His mother, Mary, owned a large house in Jerusalem and had a servant girl named Rhoda. The followers of Jesus gathered there. It has been suggested that this house may have been the site of “the upper room”, as well as the place where the disciples gathered after Jesus' ascension (cf. Mark 14:15; Acts 1:13). There is no concrete evidence, however, to verify this speculation. Peter did go to this house, where Jesus' followers gathered, immediately after the Lord's angel saved him from martyrdom at the hands of King Herod Agrippa I by releasing him from prison.

Mark's Hebrew name was John (cf. Acts 12:12). It appears that he may have come to know and believe the gospel of Jesus through Peter, for Peter called him “my son” (cf. 1 Peter 5:13). In A.D. 44 Barnabas, a cousin of Mark's (cf. Colossians 4:10), and Paul took Mark with them from Jerusalem to be their assistant in the church of Antioch, Syria (cf. Acts 11:27-30; 12:25; 13:1). This led to Mark's future work as a missionary. In A.D. 46 he accompanied Paul and Barnabas on Paul's first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13:4,5). Shortly afterwards, however, he left them in Pamphylia to return to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 13:13). For whatever reason he left, Paul did not think it was appropriate and considered it a forsaking of the work before them. When Paul and Barnabas later prepared to make their second missionary journey around A.D. 50, Barnabas desired to take Mark along. Paul strongly protested. They then parted company over this disagreement. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus. Paul took Silas and travelled over land through Syria and Cilicia enroute to Galatia (cf. Acts 15:36-16:11).

Nothing more is definitely known from Scripture about Mark's missionary work. It appears from Scripture that his work took him to the regions of what is now called Turkey, namely the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia (Minor), and Bithynia. This would seem to be the case because, when Peter wrote his first letter to the Christians in these areas, he included a greeting to them from his son Mark (cf. 1 Peter 5:13). This would suggest the Christians in these areas knew Mark personally. His work in these regions is further suggested by Paul's including a greeting from Mark to the Christians in Colosse, with the added note that they had received instructions regarding Mark and that they should welcome him if he came to them (cf. Colossians 4:10). Paul also included a personal greeting from Mark to Philemon, who was a member of the church in Colosse (cf. Philemon 24).

In addition to having been a co-worker of Barnabas, and working in the regions mentioned above, Mark became a close associate of Paul's and Peter's in Rome as well. Mark was with Paul in Rome around A.D. 60 to 61, the time of Paul's first Roman imprisonment, at which time Paul wrote his prison epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon (cf. Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24). This is made obvious by the greeting Paul included from Mark to the Colossians and to Philemon. During Paul's second Roman imprisonment, and not long before his martyrdom in A.D. 67 to 68, Paul requested that Timothy, who was in Ephesus, bring Mark with him to Rome. Paul wanted Mark in Rome with him, because Mark was of useful service to him (cf. 2 Timothy 4:11). It is possible, but not certain, therefore, that Mark was in Rome with Paul at the time of Paul's martyrdom. The greetings from Mark in Paul's letters and Paul's request for

Timothy to bring Mark with him to Rome clarify that whatever grievance Paul had had with Mark was by A.D. 60 cleared up and forgiven.

Mark was also with Peter in Rome around A.D. 62 to 64, after Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment. This is evident, because Mark was with Peter when Peter wrote his first letter in Rome between A.D. 62 and the spring of A.D. 64, which included a greeting from Mark (cf. 1 Peter 5:13).

The ancient church historian Eusebius stated that Mark went to Egypt, where he founded the congregations of Alexandria and became their first bishop. It has been said that he died a martyr's death there.

Mark, like the other three gospel writers, did not mention himself by name in his gospel as its author. Early church tradition is unanimous in crediting the gospel's authorship to Mark. Papias, a disciple of the apostle John, wrote around A.D. 130 that John had said Mark had written, not in its proper chronological order, the things he had learned from Peter regarding what Jesus had said and done. This being true, the apostle John credited Mark with the authorship of the gospel that bears his name and indicated that the gospel is really the gospel of Peter.

Papias asserted that the content of Mark's gospel contained the content of the gospel that Peter taught and preached. Mark's gospel bears the stamp of Peter's presence and first hand experiences as an eyewitness to what Jesus said and did. Jesus' calling of Peter to be a disciple and apostle appears early in the first chapter (cf. Mark 1:16-18). Jesus' activities and teaching in Capernaum are shortly thereafter reported to have taken place in close association with Peter's house. Jesus left the synagogue and went to Peter's house where he healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (cf. Mark 1:29-31). There the people were bringing to Jesus their sick and demoniacs. The whole city of Capernaum gathered at Peter's door (cf. Mark 1:32-34). When Jesus went to a solitary place, it was Peter and his companions, meaning the other disciples, who hunted for Jesus (cf. Mark 1:35-37). It was most likely Peter's house that is called Jesus' home in Mark 2:1. There so many people gathered to hear Jesus and packed the house that no one could enter through the door. Thus the paralytic had to be lowered down to Jesus on a stretcher through Peter's dismantled roof for Jesus to heal the man (cf. Mark 2:1-12). It is again likely that it was Peter's house that is called Jesus' house in Mark 2:15, where the tax collectors and “sinners” gathered to eat with Jesus amid the complaints of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. It appears that it was to Peter's house that Jesus' family and brothers came to take Jesus into custody, because they thought he was out of his mind. Mark's gospel alone recorded this personal incident with the family of Jesus and how they thought he was crazy. This appears to be an observation that was preserved by

Peter, to whose house they came looking for Jesus (cf. Mark 3:20,21). With regard to Peter's house being Jesus' house and home in Capernaum, see also Mark 7:17 and 9:28. Mark's gospel reaches a high point in the eighth chapter. First it is Peter, as spokesman for the group of disciples, who confesses that Jesus is the Christ. Then shortly thereafter it is Peter who rebukes Jesus for announcing his forthcoming suffering, death, and resurrection (cf. Mark 8:27-33). All these first hand experiences indicate Mark's gospel was an eyewitness account of Peter's, which reflections he included in the gospel of Jesus that he preached.

Occasion of the Gospel of Mark

Eusebius in his Church History mentions a statement made by Clement of Alexandria toward the end of the second century. Clement reported that those who heard Peter were so impressed with his oral discourses on the gospel of Jesus that they pleaded for Peter's companion to put his discourses into writing, so they could always recall them. This may have prompted Mark to write his gospel.

Mark began his gospel with the words, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” This is the title of the gospel. Mark's gospel is, then, about how the good news of Jesus' words and works, which were being proclaimed by the apostles, particularly with regard to Peter, began. Bearing in mind what Clement is said to have reported above, it seems that the hearers of Peter and the Christian converts wanted to know more about the gospel of Jesus that they were hearing. They wanted to know how this good news began and came into being. They wanted the words and the works of Jesus put down in writing for them. This Mark did for them in his gospel.

Characteristics of the Gospel of Mark

Mark emphasized for his readers the deeds of Jesus and presented Jesus as a man and servant of action. Jesus spoke and it was done. Forty-two times Mark used the Greek adverb euthus to indicate that Jesus was given to action. This adverb means immediately, at once, and straightway. This indicates Mark wrote his gospel for readers who were impressed with a simple, straightforward account, and with power and action.

Mark quoted from the Old Testament only once, at the outset of his gospel. This indicates Mark did not write his gospel for Jewish Christians who were familiar with the Old Testament, as Matthew did. Rather, he wrote his gospel for Gentile readers who were not familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures.

Mark explained Jewish customs for his readers, which they otherwise would not have understood, such as the Jews' ceremonial washings (cf. Mark 7:3,4) and that the preparation day was the day before the Jews' Sabbath (cf. Mark 15:42). This, too, indicates Mark wrote his gospel for Gentile readers.

Mark translated Jewish Aramaic terms for his readers (cf. Mark 3:17; 5:41; 7:11 & 34; 14:36; 15:22). This is more evidence that Mark wrote for Gentile readers.

Mark employed Latinisms in his gospel, that is, he used Latin words his readers readily understood rather than their Greek equivalents. This indicates Mark wrote his gospel for Christians in Rome and Italy.

Mark's gospel is the simplest and shortest account of all the gospels. It is a straightforward account that would have suited the Roman's practical, straightforward approach to things.

For Whom the Gospel of Mark was written

The preceding characteristics indicate that Mark wrote his gospel for Christians in Rome and Italy. This conclusion is supported by the evidence of Mark's presence in Rome in the A.D. 60's.

Place where the Gospel of Mark was written

It seems clear that Mark wrote his gospel in Rome for the Gentile Christians there. Ancient Christian tradition supports Rome as the place where Mark's gospel was written.

Date

Historical accounts indicate that Peter died a martyr's death under Emperor Nero in Rome about A.D. 64. If Clement of Alexandria was correct that Mark wrote his gospel while Peter was still living, because Peter's hearers wanted his gospel discourses preserved in writing for them, then the date for Mark's writing his gospel would have been around A.D. 63 to 64. But Papias' statement that according to the apostle John, Mark wrote what he heard from Peter, has been understood to imply that Mark wrote his gospel after Peter's death. Irenaeus wrote in the latter half of the second century, perhaps on the basis of Papias' statement, that Mark wrote his gospel after the death of both Peter and Paul. Paul died a martyr's death after Peter around A.D. 67 to 68. Since there is a lack of unanimity among these ancient Christian writers, it is perhaps best to say Mark wrote his gospel around the mid 60's A.D.

Purpose

To record for the Gentile Christians in Rome and Italy a written account of the gospel of Jesus Christ as it had been preached by Peter.

Theme of the Gospel of Mark

Jesus proved he is Christ, the Son of God, through his ministry of service (his active obedience) and through his suffering and death (his passive obedience) and resurrection. Christ, the Son of God, is the Messianic Servant.

Remarks on Outline

Scholars have outlined the Gospel of Mark in a variety of ways with marked similarities and differences. The following outline incorporates some of their outstanding features.

The following outline incorporates the theological division of Prof. Joel Gerlach on the basis of Mark 10:45, which states: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” This division divides Mark's gospel into two parts. The first part covers the active obedience of Christ in his ministry of teaching and working miracles as recounted by Mark in chapters 1 through 10. The second part covers the passive obedience of Christ in giving his life as a ransom for us all as recounted by Mark in chapters 11 through 15, and then the exultation of his glorious resurrection in chapter 16.

The following outline also incorporates differently the outline of Mark's Gospel according to the different phases of Jesus' public ministry, which began in Galilee, extended to regions beyond Galilee, and concluded in Jerusalem.

Outline

Part 1: The Prologue, Mark 1:1-13



The Synagogue in Capernaum

A. Title: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God,”

Mark 1:1

B. Preparations for the coming and the ministry of Christ, the Son of God, Mark
1:2-13

1. The preaching of John the Baptist prepared the people for the coming and ministry of Christ, the Son of God, Mark 1:2-8

2. The ministry of Christ, the Son of God, is prepared for and begun with God the Father's approval of the man Jesus as his Son, and the Holy Spirit's anointing with his gifts the man Jesus who is the Son of God, Mark 1:9-11

3. The ministry of Christ, the Son of God, is prepared for when he, as the human substitute for all mankind, meets and defeats Satan, his archenemy, Mark 1:12,13

Part 2: Jesus Proved He Is Christ, The Son of God, Through His Ministry Of Service In Teaching And Working Miracles Of Mercy (His Active Obedience, cf. Mark 10:45a), Mark 1:14-10:52

A. Jesus' early Galilean ministry, Mark 1:14-3:6

1. Jesus preached the gospel of God. The kingdom of God was at hand. The people should repent and believe so that God may rule in their hearts, Mark 1:14,15

2. Early in the second year of his ministry Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John to be fishers of men and thus calls men into discipleship with him, Mark 1:16-20

3. Jesus serves in his ministry of teaching and miraculous works of mercy at the synagogue of Capernaum. His fame spreads into the surrounding district of Galilee, Mark 1:21-28

4. Jesus sets up the headquarters for his Galilean ministry in the house of Peter and Andrew, Mark 1:29-29

a. Jesus' heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, Mark 1:29-31

b. Jesus ministry of mercy and miracles frees the sick from their ailments and the demon possessed from their demons, as the city of Capernaum gathers at Peter's door, Mark 1:32-34

c. Jesus expands his ministry of teaching and mercy to all of Galilee, Mark 1:35-39

d. Jesus heals a leper, who so spreads Jesus' fame that Jesus can no longer enter a city publicly. The crowds then flock to him in the unpopulated areas where he ministers to them, Mark 1:40-45

5. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law begin to oppose Jesus and his ministry of teaching and mercy, Mark 2:1-3:6

a. They oppose Jesus' forgiving the sins of the paralytic, who was lowered through Peter's dismantled roof, Mark 2:1-12

b. They oppose Jesus calling Levi (Matthew), a tax collector, and for eating with tax collectors and “sinners”, Mark 2:13-17

c. They oppose Jesus' disciples' not fasting, which they did not do because Jesus was with them, Mark 2:18-22

d. They oppose Jesus' allowing his disciples to violate the Pharisees' Sabbath regulations by picking heads of grain on a Sabbath day, Mark 2:23-28

e. They oppose Jesus' violating the Pharisees' Sabbath regulations by healing the withered hand of a man in the synagogue on a Sabbath day, Mark 3:1-6

B. Jesus' later Galilean ministry of teaching and mercy, Mark 3:7-6:6

1. The fame of Jesus' ministry spreads to the areas surrounding Galilee. He continues to free the sick from their ailments and the demon possessed from their demons. Even the demons, Jesus' enemies, acknowledge he is the Son of God, Mark 3:7-12

2. Jesus appoints his twelve apostles to carry his ministry of teaching and mercy to many others, Mark 3:13-19

3. Opposition to Jesus and his ministry increases, Mark 3:20-35

a. Jesus' own brothers try to take him into their custody, because they think he is crazy, Mark 3:20,21

b. The teachers of the law accuse Jesus of being demonically possessed himself and in league with Satan. Jesus asserts the folly of their accusation, reveals he is greater than Satan, and declares that they have no forgiveness for their sin against the Holy Spirit, Mark 3:22-30

c. Jesus distinguishes that his true family of brothers is his disciples, who listen to him and do the will of God of heeding the gospel he is preaching, Mark 3:31-35

4. Jesus teaches the crowds in parables as a judgment on their hardened, unbelieving hearts. But he explains the meaning of the parables to his disciples for their spiritual growth in understanding the truths of the kingdom of God, Mark 4:1-34

5. Jesus unveils in his ministry of mercy the divine power he possesses as the Son of God to support the gospel he is preaching. He does so that his disciples' faith in him would be confirmed, Mark 4:35-5:34

a. Jesus mercifully calms the storm to save his disciples. He then rebukes them for their weakness of faith in him. In this miracle he shows his divine power over nature, Mark 4:35-41

b. Jesus mercifully casts out the demons from Legion to release him from their evil tyranny. He then instructs Legion to proclaim to his townspeople what great things God had mercifully done for him. In this miracle he shows his divine power over his demonic enemies, who can do nothing without his prior approval, Mark 5:1-20

c. Jesus mercifully raises Jairus' daughter in the presence of his three closest disciples. In this miracle he shows his divine power over death and to give life, Mark 5:31-24 and 35-43

d. Jesus mercifully heals a woman of her long term haemorrhage, showing his divine power over illness, and commends her for her faith in him that gives her his divine peace, Mark 5:25-34

6. Jesus brings his ministry of teaching and mercy to his home town of Nazareth. His townspeople are offended by his teachings and miracles, and refuse to believe in him, Mark 6:1-6a

C. Jesus embarks upon his retirement journeys into the regions outside of Galilee at the close of the second year and the beginning of the third year of his ministry, Mark 6:6b-8:30

1. Jesus sends out his twelve apostles to conduct his ministry of teaching and mercy that he entrusts to them, Mark 6:6b-13

2. The people are divided over who Jesus is. King Herod thinks Jesus is John the Baptist who has been resurrected from the dead, whom Herod had earlier beheaded, Mark 6:14-29

3. After the apostles return from their missionary journey, Jesus retires to a lonely place to be with them. A multitude gathers to him. There Jesus feeds the five thousand, displaying his divine mercy and power that provides the necessities of life for the people, Mark 6:30-44

4. Jesus retires to Bethsaida with his disciples. He walks on the water and calms the wind, again showing his divine power over nature, Mark 6:45-52

5. Jesus retires to Gennesaret, where he conducts his ministry of mercy to serve the people, Mark 6:53-56

6. When the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticize Jesus for not teaching his disciples to obey the traditions of the rabbis, Jesus rebukes them for their hypocritical teachings that set aside the commandments of God. Jesus teaches

the multitude that what defiles a person is not external things he consumes, but the sins that proceed from his own evil heart, Mark 7:1-23

7. Jesus retires to the city of Tyre in Syria, where he extends his ministry of mercy to a Gentile woman of Syrophoencia and her daughter, Mark 7:24-30

8. Jesus retires through Sidon in Syria to the region of the Decapolis. There he mercifully opens the ears and the mouth of a deaf mute to the astonishment of the people, Mark 7:31-37

9. Jesus retires to a lonely place where a great multitude comes to him. Jesus has mercy on the hungry people and serves them by miraculously feeding the four thousand. He then retires to the district of Dalmanutha, Mark 8:1-10

10. When the Pharisees demand a miraculous sign to test him, Jesus tells them that he will give them no sign to attest to his identity and authority, Mark 8:11-13

11. Jesus warns his disciples about the leaven, the false teachings, of the unbelieving Pharisees, Mark 8:14-21

12. Jesus again retires to Bethsaida, where he mercifully serves a blind man by restoring his sight, Mark 8:22-26

13. Jesus retires with his disciples to Caesarea Philippi. There Peter, in behalf of the group of disciples, confesses Jesus to be the Christ, who was promised by God in the Old Testament Scriptures, Mark 8:27-30

D. Jesus brings his ministry of teaching and mercy in Galilee to a close, Mark 8:31-9:50

1. Jesus begins to impress the message of the cross on his disciples, Mark 8:31-9:1

a. Jesus announces his forthcoming suffering and death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, Mark 8:31,32a

b. When Peter rebukes him for going to the cross, Jesus rebukes Peter and instructs his disciples that to be his disciples they also must deny themselves to carry the cross assigned to them in connection with confessing him and his gospel, Mark 8:32b-9:1

2. Jesus allows his three closest disciples to see his divine glory, which he had been keeping hidden. They see the glory into which he will enter through his suffering. They also hear God the Father's command to listen to Jesus, who is his beloved Son, Mark 9:2-8

3. His three closest disciples do not understand what Jesus' rising from the dead meant and ask about Elijah's coming first. Jesus explains that Elijah, John the Baptist, had come. Jesus himself would suffer as John the Baptist before him had suffered, Mark 9:9-13

4. Down from the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus mercifully casts out a demon from a boy, whom his disciples could not help, Mark 9:14-29

5. Jesus proceeds through Galilee, teaching his disciples along the way about his coming suffering, death, and resurrection, which they still did not understand, Mark 9:30-32

6. Jesus teaches his disciples that the greatest among them must be the servant of all the others, a role which Jesus had been modelling for them, Mark 9:33-37

7. Jesus corrects the disciples' misconception of their exclusivity in serving him. Everyone who serves as his servant will be rewarded. His disciples should not cause others to stumble in their faith and should eliminate whatever would cause themselves to stumble. They are to have salt in themselves and be at peace with one another, Mark 9:38-50

E. Jesus conducts his ministry of teaching and mercy as he travels to his cross in Jerusalem, Mark 10:1-52

1. Jesus conducts his Judean and Perean ministry of teaching, Mark 10:1

2. Jesus teaches the Pharisees and his disciples that the Jews' loose divorce law is wrong. Marriage is to be upheld as a life-long union as God had made it in the beginning, Mark 10:2-12

3. Jesus teaches his disciples to let the little children be brought to him, for the kingdom of God belongs to them, Mark 10:13-16

4. Jesus teaches the rich man, who wants to inherit eternal life, to give up his possessions to follow him. The rich man refuses to give up his possessions to follow Jesus, Mark 10:17-22

5. Jesus teaches his disciples how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God and be saved. Those who are saved are saved by God's doing, not their own, Mark 10:23-27

6. Jesus teaches his disciples that those who leave their life for him and his gospel will be rewarded on earth, as well as be persecuted and receive eternal life, Mark 10:28-31

7. Jesus again teaches his disciples on the way to Jerusalem that he is going there to suffer at the hands of the Jewish leaders and to be put to death by the Gentile Romans, but that he would rise on the third day, Mark 10:32-34

8. James and John desire to be recognized as the greatest of the disciples, over which the others become angry. Jesus again teaches them that whoever desires to be greatest among them must be the servant of the others, Jesus himself is their example. He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as the ransom to save many (all), Mark 10:35-45

9. Jesus passes through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem, where he mercifully restores the sight of blind Bartimaeus, who believes Jesus is the promised Christ, the Son of David, Mark 10:46-52

Part 3: Jesus Proved He Is Christ, The Son of God, Through His Suffering And Death (His Passive Obedience, cf. Mark 10:45b) And His Resurrection, Mark 11:1-16:20

A. Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, Mark 11:1-13:37

1. Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as Christ the King, Mark 11:1-11

2. Jesus looks for fruits in keeping with repentance, Mark 11:12-12:12

a. Jesus condemns the fig tree without any fruit, Mark 11:12-14

b. Jesus pronounces his judgment on the impiety of the Jews by cleansing the temple for the second time, and in so doing calls them to repentance, Mark 11:15-18

c. The withered fig tree provides Jesus the opportunity to teach his disciples about the power of faith and prayer, Mark 11:19-26

d. Jesus refuses to validate his divine authority for the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders, Mark 11:27-33

e. Through his Parable of the Rebellious Tenants, Jesus announces the judgment and destruction that God will bring on the unbelieving Jewish leaders, who refuse to repent of their unbelief and to accept him as the Son of God, Mark 12:1-12

3. Jesus disarms his opponents, Mark 12:13-44

a. The Pharisees and the Herodians, Mark 12:13-17

b. The liberal Sadducees, Mark 12:18-27

c. Jesus compliments a teacher of the law for seeing clearly what is the will of God in the Old Testament Scriptures, Mark 12:28-34

d. Jesus unmasks the spiritual blindness of the teachers of the law, who could not see that the Christ would be both the Lord and man in one and the same person, Mark 12:35-37

e. Jesus warns those in the temple against the hypocrisy of the teachers of the law, Mark 12:38-40

f. Jesus points to the widow's offering of two mites as an example of true faith, love for God, and piety, Mark 12:41-44

4. Jesus teaches his disciples about the things that would take place in the future, Mark 13:1-37

a. Jesus foretells the coming destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, Mark 13:1,2

b. Jesus teaches his disciples what signs to look for that point to his coming and to the end of all things, Mark 13:3-23

b.1 The signs that would occur in society and nature, Mark 13:3-8

b.2 The signs that would occur within the church on earth, Mark 13:9-13

b.3 The destruction of Jerusalem and the Jews as a nation, and the great tribulation, Mark 13:14-23

b.4 The last signs in the universe that signal Jesus' glorious return, when his angels will gather up his elect believers, Mark 13:24-27

c. Jesus' Parable of the Budding Fig Tree teaches his disciples that when they see all these preceding things taking place, they will know his coming is at hand, Mark 13:28-32

d. Jesus teaches his disciples to stay alert for his glorious return, Mark 13:33-37

B. Jesus' suffering and death, Mark 14:1-15:47

1. At the hands of the Jews, Mark 14:1-72

a. The Jewish leaders desire to seize Jesus secretly so they may kill him, Mark 14:1,2

b. Mary anoints Jesus with a costly perfume. Knowing his death on the cross is imminent, Jesus commends her for anointing him for his burial, Mark 14:3-9

c. Judas Iscariot plots with the chief priests to betray Jesus to them for a sum of money, Mark 14:10,11

d. Jesus has two disciples prepare the Passover meal in the upper room, Mark 14:12-16

e. Jesus announces during the Passover meal that one of his disciples would betray him. He would go to his suffering and death as the Old Testament Scriptures foretold that he would, Mark 14:17-21

f. Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal, Mark 14:22-25

g. Jesus leads his disciples to the Mount of Olives. He tells them they will all desert him and that Peter will deny him three times, Mark 14:26-31

h. Jesus prays in Gethsemane and faces the bitter prospect of his imminent suffering and death on the cross, Mark 14:32-42

i. Jesus meets his betrayer, Judas, who brings an armed crowd to seize him. Judas betrays him with a kiss. Jesus is arrested and his disciples flee, Mark 14:43-52

j. Jesus is taken to the high priest and illegally tried by the Jewish leaders. They condemn him to death and beat him for blasphemy, because he admits he is Christ, the Son of God, Mark 14:53-65

k. Peter denies knowing Jesus and immediately afterwards weeps in remorse, Mark 14:66-72

2. At the hands of Pilate and the Gentile Roman soldiers, Mark 15:1-47

a. The Jewish leaders turn Jesus over to Pilate for execution. Pilate interrogates Jesus, Mark 15:1-5

b. Pilate offers the Jewish mob a choice between having Jesus released or the insurrectionist and murderer Barabbas. Spurred on by the Jewish leaders, the mob chooses Barabbas and demands Jesus be crucified. To satisfy the mob, Pilate has his soldiers scourge Jesus and take him to be crucified, Mark 15:6-15

c. After mocking and beating Jesus, the Roman soldiers lead Jesus out of the palace to be crucified, Mark 15:16-21

d. The soldiers crucify Jesus on Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, between two criminals. The Jewish passers-by and leaders mock Jesus as Christ, the King of Israel, Mark 15:22-32

e. God shrouds Jesus' suffering in darkness for three hours and forsakes Jesus to the torments of hell for the sins of the world. Upon Jesus' giving himself into death, the veil in the temple is torn in two. Mankind now has direct access to the God of mercy and salvation through Jesus' death. The Roman centurion, who was in charge of crucifying Jesus, confesses that Jesus was truly the Son of God, Mark 15:33-41

f. Pilate turns the dead body of Jesus over to Joseph of Arimathea for burial. Joseph buries Jesus' body in the tomb, Mark 15:42-47

C. Jesus' resurrection, Mark 16:1-20

1. The women discover the tomb is empty and hear from an angel that Jesus has risen from the dead. They hurry to tell Jesus' disciples, Mark 16:1-8

2. The risen Lord Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene. She reports the good news of Jesus' resurrection to the disciples, who refuse to believe it, Mark 16:9-11

3. Jesus appears alive to the two disciples who were walking to Emmaus. The disciples do not believe their report of Jesus' resurrection either, Mark 16:12,13

4. Jesus appears to the eleven disciples. After rebuking their unbelief, he commissions them to preach his gospel to all people, Mark 16:14-18

5. Jesus ascends into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. The disciples then go out preaching Jesus' gospel everywhere, while the Lord confirmed their message with attesting miracles, Mark 16:19,20



Galilee from the Mount of Beatitudes

Commentary on the Gospel of Mark (2)

By Arno Clemens Gaebelein (Public domain)

Introduction

The Gospel of Mark is the briefest of the four Gospels. The traditional view, which holds that the Apostle Peter dictated this record into the pen of Mark, so that he was only an amanuensis, has been proven erroneous. Equally incorrect are other theories, that the Gospel of Mark was written first and served Matthew and Luke in giving their account, copying from it and making additions, or, the hypothesis that there was an original record, a common source, which the Evangelists used. All these opinions are mostly the inventions of men who disbelieve the inspiration of the chosen instruments of God in giving a fourfold picture of His blessed Son on earth. An unswerving faith in the inspiration of the

four Evangelists solves all the supposed difficulties and discrepancies of which we hear so much in our days. Inspiration makes error impossible.

Mark was not an Apostle. Two Apostles were chosen to write Gospel records, Matthew and John. The other two, Mark and Luke, did not belong to the twelve. Mark's and John's Gospels give us the chronological account, while Matthew and Luke were led under the guidance of the Holy Spirit not to pen the events chronologically, but to arrange them in such a way as to bring out the distinctive features of their respective Gospels.

While Matthew describes the Lord Jesus Christ as the King, Luke as the Son of Man in His perfection, John as the true God and the eternal life, Mark was chosen to write the account of our Lord as the obedient Servant. It was announced by the Prophets that He would appear as a servant. Isaiah beheld Him as the Servant of God. Through Zechariah the Spirit of God announced, "Behold, I will bring forth my Servant, the Branch" (Zechariah 3:8). And after He had been on earth in the form of a servant, the Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Philippians tells us again that He who ever existed in the form of God "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). Mark, himself a servant, was graciously called to give a pen picture of this blessed Servant and to record His toil, His service of love and patience, as well as His mighty works. All which does not stand in definite relation to our Lord as the Servant is carefully omitted, and many other things omitted by the other Evangelists are added, to describe the manner and perfection of the Servant's work.

The purpose of the Gospel of Mark must never be lost sight of in studying it. Well may we call it the neglected Gospel, for it is the least studied. God gave it that we His redeemed people might as His servants have a pattern in our service. One thing, however, is absolutely necessary in the intelligent and spiritual study of Mark and that is a constant comparison with the Gospel of Matthew. Such a comparison will bring out the beauties of the record given by Mark and shows the divine power which guided infallibly these men of God.

We have therefore given in the analysis the parallel passages from the Gospel of Matthew and from the Gospel of Luke. The analysis contains many hints and annotations, which will help in a closer study. At the close of the analyzed Gospel the reader will find several articles on the personality of Mark, the characteristic features of this Gospel and other information, which, we hope, will prove of help to all students of this part of God's Holy Word.

THE ANALYSIS OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

"For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Mark 10:45.

Part I. The Servant; who He is and how He came. Chapter 1:1-13.

Part II. The Servant's work; not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Chapter 1.14-10:52.

Part III. The Servant in Jerusalem. Presented as King and rejected. Chapter 11-13.

Part IV. Giving His Life a ransom for many. Chapter 14-15:47.

Part V. The Servant Highly exalted. Risen and Ascended; His commission to His servants and working with them. Chapter 16.

Mark the Writer of this Gospel

Were we to give even the gist of theories on the Gospel of Mark and how it was written, we would have to fill many pages. That is needless and even unprofitable. The chosen instrument to write this Gospel in which the Lord Jesus Christ is so beautifully pictured as the Servant of God on earth, was not an Apostle, but himself a servant. We find his name mentioned for the first time in Acts 12:12-25. His full name was John Mark and his mother's name Mary. In Acts 13:5; Acts 13:13 he is called by the first name John, while in Acts 15:39 we read of him as Mark. He accompanied Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey as a helper. We read nowhere that he addressed a single gathering. When they reached Perga he left the Apostles and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). The reason of this abrupt departure was failure on Mark's side. He did not want to work and had become unprofitable (Acts 15:38, compare with 2 Timothy 4:11). On account of his failure Paul and Barnabas had a falling out and separated from each other. Paul refused him as a companion on the second journey, but Barnabas wanted to take him again (Acts 15:37-40). He went with Barnabas to Cyprus (Acts 15:39). The Holy Spirit has nothing to report of this journey. A period of unprofitableness followed for John Mark till he was restored to service. That such was the case we learn from Colossians 4:10; Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:11. He had become Paul's fellow laborer. This personal history of John Mark is of blessed encouragement. He who had such an humble place as a servant of the two mighty men of God and who even failed in that, when restored became the divinely chosen and inspired instrument

to pen the perfect Servant's path down here. Have we failed as servants? Let us go and tell Him all about it. He will have better service for us.

Tradition linked him with Peter and makes him a Bishop in Alexandria. There is no truth in it. All we know is that he was led to Christ by the Apostle Peter and was with him in Babylon (1 Peter 5:13).

THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF MARK.

[We can heartily recommend "The Gospel of Mark" by W. Kelly. The excellent notes and hints by the editor of this volume, Mr. Whitefield, make the book still more valuable. Also A. Jukes on the four Gospels. We acknowledge our indebtedness to both.]

A careful study of the preceding analysis and comparison with the other Gospel records will bring out the characteristic features of this Gospel. Many events recorded in Matthew, Luke and John are omitted in Mark because they have no bearing upon the Servant's work. We find not a word about a genealogy, nor is there any reference to Bethlehem, David's city. The Lord is called but once the son of David in Mark's Gospel. Nor do we find a word about His childhood spent in Nazareth and the details of His temptations in the wilderness. The sermon on the mount so fully reported in Matthew is altogether omitted, because He spoke it as the king, proclaiming the principles of the kingdom. Many of the parables are omitted by Mark, for instance, five of those which appear in Matthew 13:1-58; also a number of others found in Matthew, notably those of Matthew 25:1-46, and the description of the judgment of the nations, when He comes again. The lengthy woes pronounced upon the religious leaders of the nation (Matthew 23:1-39) are likewise nearly all absent. All these omissions are the evidences of the verbal inspiration of this Gospel and if closely studied will show the divine wisdom. The word "Lord" as applying to Him is carefully omitted by Mark. Textual investigation has shown that "Lord" in Mark 9:24 does not belong there. But in the Resurrection chapter He is called "Lord." In a number of passages in the analysis attention has been called to additions, sentences, verses and sections not found in other Gospels. Many have not been mentioned, but the most prominent are pointed out. These additions reveal the quality of His service and give us descriptions of His moral Glory. We ask our readers to look up once more the following passages and compare them with the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 1:13; Matt. 1:31, compare Luke 4:39; Luke 3:5 compare Matthew 12:13; Mark 3:34 compare Matthew 12:47 and Luke 8:21; Luke 4:33; Luke 6:31 compare Matthew 14:15; Mark 4:36; Mark 8:33 compare Matthew 16:23; Matthew 9:36 compare Matthew 18:2; Matthew 8:23; Matthew 8:33; Matthew 9:27 compare with Matthew 17:18; Matthew 10:16 compare

Matthew 19:13; Matthew 19:15; Matthew 10:21; Matthew 10:23 compare Matthew 19:21-23; Matthew 16:7 compare Matthew 28:7, et cetera.

The parable in Mark 4:26-27 is found only in Mark. Then there are two miracles which are exclusively reported by Mark. They are characteristic of true ministry. These are the deaf man in Mark 7:32-37 and the blind man at Bethsaida, Mark 8:22-26.

The characteristic word of the Gospel of Mark is the word “straightway.” The Greek word has also been translated “forthwith” and “immediately.” It occurs some 40 times in this little Gospel and is the Servant’s word.

“But enough. Blessed be God that such service has been seen on earth; that there has been such a hand, such an eye, and such a heart here, among the sons of men. And blessed be God, that by the same Spirit He waits to mould us to His pattern, yea, that He has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His beloved Son. And if the Head was content to serve thus;--if, while He tarried here, He lived to meet the need of all who sought succor;--if, now risen, He Is yet the same, still the loving Worker, interceding within the veil, and working here too for us;--if He shall yet serve us, ‘for the less is blessed of the greater,’ when in the coming kingdom He shall still lead His flock to living fountains, and wipe away their tears;--shall not we whom He has purchased, in whom He seeks to dwell, who are His witnesses in a world which knows Him not, wait upon Him until His mantle fall on us, and His Spirit, ‘the oil which was upon the Head,’ run down even to us also; till we catch the mind of heaven, and are made like unto the angels, children of God and children of resurrection, called to stand in the presence of God, and yet to serve, as ministering spirits to them who shall be heirs of salvation? God is serving,--’the Father worketh,’--Oh! what works of love, from the rain and fruitful seasons up to the mighty work of raising man from earth to highest heaven; and Christ has served, and is serving; and the Holy Ghost is serving, taking of the things of Christ, to reveal them to us, and then to work them in us; and angels are serving, and saints are serving, and the Church proclaims her call, that she too because redeemed must be a servant here, and that her rulers are but servants, yea, servants of servants; and heaven is serving earth, and earth the creatures on it, So let us, after our Pattern, being redeemed, go forth to serve also. ‘Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find so doing. Verily, He shall gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and He will come forth and serve them.’ O Lord, Thou canst perform it; perform it to Thy praise; Oh! shew us the glory of Thy service, full of grace and truth, that in its presence we may be changed; and as we have borne the image of the earthy, may even here bear to Thy glory the image of the heavenly. Amen.” (A. Jukes)

PART I. THE SERVANT WHO HE IS AND HOW HE CAME

Chapter 1:1-13. The Servant's coming

Verse 1. The Servant's identity

Verses 2-8. The Servants coming promised and announced

Verses 9-11. The Servant's baptism

Verses 12-13. The Servant's testing

1:14-45. Ministry in Galilee

Verses 14-15. The Servant's message

Verses 16-20. The Servant calls helpers

Verses 21-28. The Servant casts out demons in Capernaum

Verses 29-45. Other ministries of the Servant

Chapter 1:1-13

*1. The Servant, the Son of God. (*Mark 1:1.*)*

*2. His coming promised and announced. (*Mark 1:2-8. Matthew 3:1-11*;* Luke 3:1-18*;* John 1:19-30.*)*

*3. The Servant comes forth. (*Mark 1:9-11. Matthew 3:13-17*;* Luke 3:21-22*;* John 1:31-34.*)*

*4. The Servant in the wilderness. (*Mark 1:12-13. Matthew 4:1-11*;* Luke 4:1-13.*)*

1. The Servant, the Son of God., Mark 1:1.

No other Gospel begins in this way. The Deity of our Lord is first of all emphasized. Nothing is said about the virgin birth, nor is a genealogy given. The miraculous birth is most fully brought out in Luke's Gospel, the Gospel of our Lord's humanity. No genealogy appears in Mark; a servant does not need such. Nor do we find Bethlehem mentioned, or the event which is characteristic to the Gospel of Matthew, the visit of the wise men, seeking the newborn King of the Jews. All these and other matters are omitted because they do not fall within the scope and purpose of the Gospel of Mark. The Servant is the Son of God. This

great truth is fully attested by His obedience in always doing the will of Him that sent Him and by His mighty miracles which accompanied His loving service. If He were not the Son of God He could not have rendered the perfect service. Sonship and Service always go together. Only a Son of God can be a servant of God. Grace makes us, if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, sons of God. True service for God is the result of the enjoyment Of our son place in Christ Jesus. A deeper realization and enjoyment of our sonship will be followed by a more obedient and constant service. The Gospel of John gives the fullest witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31). The Gospel of Mark shows that He is the Son of God by His wonderful character as the Servant.

2. His Coming promised and announced. Mark 1:2-8.

Prophets promised His Coming (Malachi 3:1). The passage proves Him to be Jehovah. In Malachi we read that Jehovah says "he shall prepare the way before Me." The Spirit of God changes the "Me" to "Thy Face." The servant is none other than Jehovah, who spoke to the Prophets. Isaiah 40:3 is likewise quoted. Here too we find the same testimony that Jesus the Servant is Jehovah. "Prepare ye the way of Jehovah."

The account of the ministry of John the Baptist is the briefest in the Gospel of Mark. A few sentences only describe his testimony in the wilderness and his person. All the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem went out to him. The baptism of John in the river of Jordan was the outward sign of repentance. They confessed their sins. A comparison with the record of the Baptist's ministry in Matthew, Luke and John is very instructive. In Mark all the preaching of John concerning the state of the nation is omitted, for the Holy Spirit describes in Mark John's ministry only as a necessary preliminary to introduce the Servant and His ministry. Of the baptism which Christ is to bring Mark mentions "the Holy Spirit;" "and with fire" is left out. The fire baptism is His judgment work stated in Matthew and Luke. Christ as the humble Servant does not execute judgment, but the coming King (Matthew) and the Son of Man coming again (Luke) will judge and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

3. The Servant comes forth., Mark 1:9-11

The Servant appears to begin His service. From Nazareth of Galilee He came forth. There too during the hidden years He had served. The Servant was absolutely sinless and yet He was baptized in Jordan. He showed His perfect willingness to take, in obedience to the Father's will, the sinner's place in death. In Mark 1:10 the word "straightway" is found for the first in Mark. It is the

characteristic word of this Gospel describing the promptness of His service. The anointing by the reception of the Spirit follows. In Matthew we read "heaven was opened unto Him." In Luke, "heaven was opened." In Mark "He saw the heavens opened." Encouraging sight for Him, who had taken the lowest place! All God's servants need the vision of this opened heavens. The Father's voice proclaimed Him then as His beloved Son.

4. The Servant in the Wilderness. Mark 1:12-13

Upon this He was driven immediately into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan. His fitness to be the Servant to minister and give His life for a ransom was fully proven in His victorious conflict. The different temptations are not reported by Mark; they belong to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, where we find them. But here we have a statement which is peculiar to Mark. "And was with the wild beasts." It tells of his deep humiliation. Moses and Elijah were in the wilderness being prepared for service. David also had been alone in the solitary places. None, however, was in the place which He took, whose eternal abode was the Father's bosom. The wilderness and the wild beasts are the witnesses of a marred creation; the mighty Creator had come in the form of the creature to meet and overcome under such conditions the fallen being, Satan. Some have taught that He was in danger of being attacked by the wild beasts. This was impossible (Psalms 91:9-13).

PART II. THE SERVANT'S WORK NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, BUT TO MINISTER -- Chapter 1:14-10:52

Chapter 1:14-45.

The Ministry in Galilee after John's Imprisonment.

*1. The Servant in Galilee preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. (*Mark 1:14-15. Matthew 4:12-17*;* Luke 4:14-15.*)*

*2. The Calling of fellow servants. (*Mark 1:16-20. Matthew 4:18-22*;* Luke 5:1-11.*)*

*3. The Servant in Capernaum. (*Mark 1:21-28*;* Luke 4:31-37.*)*

4. Peter's Mother-*in-law raised up. (*Mark 1:29-31. Matthew 8:14-15*;* Luke 4:38-39.*)*

*5. The Servant heals many and casts out demons. (*Mark 1:32-34. Luke 4:31-37*;* Matthew 8:16-18*;* Luke 4:40-41.*)*

*6. The Servant in prayer. (*Mark 1:35.*)*

*7. The Interruption and the renewed service. (*Mark 1:36-39. Luke 4:42-44. *8. The Leper healed. (*Mark 1:40-45. Matthew 8:1-4*;* Luke 5:12-16.*)*

1. The Servant in Galilee preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. Mark 1:14-15.

The Servant begins His blessed service in Galilee immediately after John had been put into prison. And now the Lord takes up the hushed testimony of the forerunner. The heralding of the Kingdom at hand through the presence of Him who came to His own is less prominent in Mark. In the first twelve chapters of the Gospel of Matthew it is one of the leading features. The time, indeed, was fulfilled. While Matthew and Luke report the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom with the demand to repent, here in Mark the words are added "and believe the Gospel." This gospel is of course not the Gospel of our salvation. That was not preached till after He had finished the work the Father gave Him to do.

2. The Calling of fellow servants., Mark 1:16-20.

It is a blessed scene which we have before us. The Servant of God calls fellow servants, weak and sinful men, to become fishers of men. These are Simon and Andrew, James and John. They knew Him and had believed in Him. They were his disciples. But now He calls them into service. "Come ye after Me." The Grace which called them gave them power to forsake earthly things and to come after Him. Boats and nets, their trade as fishermen and even their father, Zebedee, were left behind. Oh! blessed place to serve the Lord Christ and yield obedience to His call. We must own Him as Lord and follow Him in His own path of faith, obedience and humility. To seek others and bring them to Himself is the service to which He still calls. Note the word "straightway" in Mark 1:17 and Mark 1:20.

3. The Servant in Capernaum. Mark 1:21-28.

The Servant and His fellow servants went to Capernaum. Straightway he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath to teach. His first preaching in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30) is not reported by Mark. It is after they thrust Him out of the city where He had been brought up, that He went to Capernaum. The blessed Servant knew no discouragement nor self pity. They laid their wicked hands on Him in Nazareth, then He went on to Capernaum and straightway taught there. His doctrine uttered with authority and power astonished all, yet He ever was the meek and lowly One. But the Word had another effect. A man with an unclean

spirit interrupted Him in the synagogue. Satan’s power was present and the demons were forced to confess “Jesus of Nazareth “ as “the Holy One of God.” Then the Servant’s power is manifested. He rebuked him and commanded the demon to come out of him. The Servant’s fame spread abroad throughout all that region.

4. Peter’s Mother-in-law raised up. Mark 1:29-31.

This miracle is found in the Gospel of Matthew in a different setting. For the dispensational setting see “The Gospel of Matthew,” chapter 8. The place given to this miracle here is equally significant. The first healing of disease in the Gospel of Mark follows the casting out of the demon, the defeat of Satan’s power. This order will be followed when He comes again, not as the lowly Servant, but as the mighty King. Then Satan will be bound first and the greatest spiritual and physical blessings will come to this poor world at last. Concerning the healing of Peter’s wife’s mother, Matthew tells us “He touched her hand;” Luke “He stood over her and rebuked the fever.” Mark’s testimony by the Holy Spirit is “He took her by the hand and lifted her up.” How beautiful! It reveals the tenderness, the loving sympathy of the blessed One. With what gentleness He must have lifted her up so as to avoid another pang of pain in her feverish body; but immediately she was healed. And He is still the same.

5. The Servant heals many and casts out demons. Mark 1:32-34.

Deliverance from demons and divers diseases came to many on that memorable day “when the sun did set.” We must view these deliverances and healings in Mark’s Gospel not so much as the evidences of His power as the manifestations of the great love and goodness of the Servant. Then He suffered the demons not to speak, because they knew Him. He loved to be unknown and did not want the applause of men nor the witness of the unclean spirits. Of His unostentatiousness we shall find further evidences.

6. The Servant in Prayer., Mark 1:35.

And after such a day of uninterrupted toil, preaching, healing diseases, driving out demons, occupied from early morning till the sun did set, we find Him, rising a great while before day, in a solitary place, praying. He is alone in the presence of the Father. Thus it was fulfilled, “He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear as the instructed” (Isaiah 50:4). Only Mark gives us this precious information. It tells us that the Servant, though the Son of God, walked in complete dependence on God His Father. Prayer is the expression of such dependence. He had been anointed with the Spirit for His

work, heard the Father's loving approval, defeated Satan, cast out demons, healed divers diseases, yet He is still the dependent One. Independence in service for God is a snare, the very spirit of Satan. The perfect Servant had His times for quietness, retirement and prayer, in which He cast Himself anew upon Him, whom to glorify He had come to earth. "And if He thus retired to be with God, Himself the Lord God, before He entered upon the work of the day, can we wonder that we fail so much in outward labor, who fail yet more in this inward intimacy with our Father? Be assured, the secret of holy strength and endurance in service is found there alone." (W. Kelly. "Gospel of Mark.") What child of God does not feel the deep necessity of this and deplores the neglect of this blessed privilege?

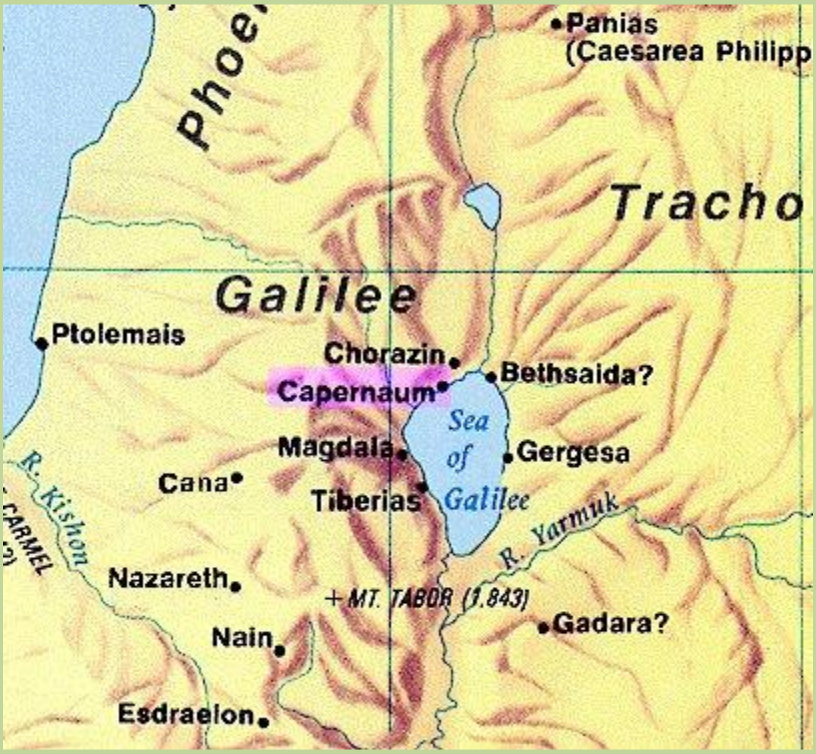
7. The Interruption and the renewed service., Mark 1:36-39.

But He is followed by his disciples and is interrupted even in prayer. No rebuke comes from His lips. Willing He responds to the new demands. For that He came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

8. The Leper healed., Mark 1:40-45.

Leprosy, that vile and loathsome disease, is a type of sin. Like sin it is incurable and only Jehovah could cure leprosy. When Jehovah had healed the disease the priest had to pronounce the leper clean. This leper recognized in the humble Servant the mighty Jehovah. He kneeled in His presence and expressed his faith in His power and implored Him to make him clean. Here again Mark tells us something of our blessed Lord, which we find neither in Matthew or Luke's account. He was moved with compassion. Thus the spirit of God in some brief additions portrays the Servant in His loving service. The leper is healed. The Servant is Jehovah and both His love and His power are revealed. He charged him to say nothing to any man. In this the Servant once more manifests His humility, that He served in an unostentatious way. He did not want honor from man. His Father knew all His service; that was enough for Him. Yet the enemy through the cleansed leper attempted the popularity of the Servant. He sought the desert places once more to hide Himself. May we serve after this great pattern Servant.

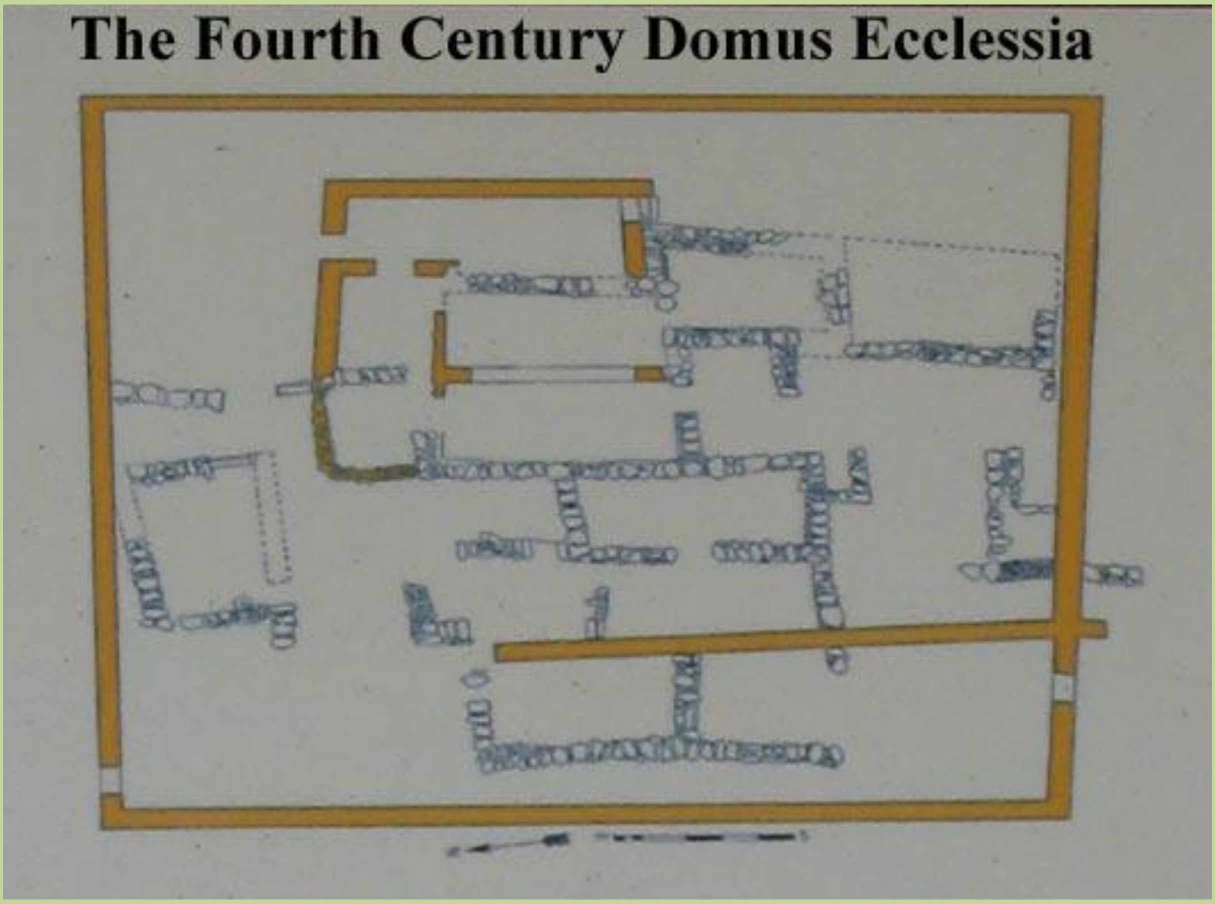
Archaeological light



Next picture, This strongly implies they had only one synagogue and the archaeological evidence bears this out. The photo is of the remains of a later synagogue that was used in Capernaum, built on the same spot as the one that Jesus would have worshiped in in the first century.

Synagogue worship was both formal and informal. There was a dress code. There were strict rules of decorum. The congregation would have been seated, probably on benches, and always situated so as to be facing Jerusalem. Men were separated from women by a partition and separate entrances. Beyond the middle of the synagogue was a platform and upon the platform was a lectern made of wood. Scripture was read from behind the lectern and prayers were offered. According to Edersheim, readers stood, while preachers sat. In other words, a man would stand behind the lectern to read a passage, then sit down to explain it.





Following an unbroken sequence of occupation, the insula sacra underwent major changes in the late fourth century A.D. First of all, insula n. 1 was set

apart from the rest of the village through the construction of an impressive enclosure wall encompassing a perimeter of 112.25 m. The area enclosed by the wall was roughly square in ground plan and was entered from two doorways respectively near the SW and NW corners of the enclosure wall. An additional screen wall in a NS direction departed from the SW entrance.

The construction of the enclosure wall brought about the destruction of some houses. At the same time room n. 1 became the focal point of the reshaped insula sacra and underwent significant changes. To start with, the inner space of room n. 1, measuring 5.80 by 6.45 m, received a new polychrome pavement. An arch spanning from N to S across the middle of the chamber was added in order to subdivide the space in two units. The N wall of the room was rebuilt, whereas the remaining three walls were left standing. A new roof made up of strong mortar replaced the old one. Finally an E atrium with white plastered pavement and a NE side-chamber were added. Both the inner walls and the newly built arch in the centre of the room were plastered.

It is significant that in due time the piers of the central arch received two superimposed coatings of painted plaster; whereas three successive layers are preserved along the old walls of the room. This observation leads us to the conclusion that the inner walls of room n. 1 were plastered at least once before the fourth century. This conclusion is in line with the palaeographic study of the graffiti the oldest of which are dated by Fr. Testa in the early third century A.D.

Different colours were used to decorate the plastered walls, namely red, pink, brick-red, yellow, dark brown, green, blue and white. The geometric decoration is made up of rectangular panels, lozenges, circles, floral crosses etc. Floral motifs are also recognisable, such as branches, small trees, flowers, figs and pomegranates. Apparently no human or animal representations were allowed.

Last but not least, several graffiti, monograms and symbols were found. The languages used in the graffiti are Greek (151 samples), Paleo-Estrangelo (13), Aramaic (9) and Latin (2).

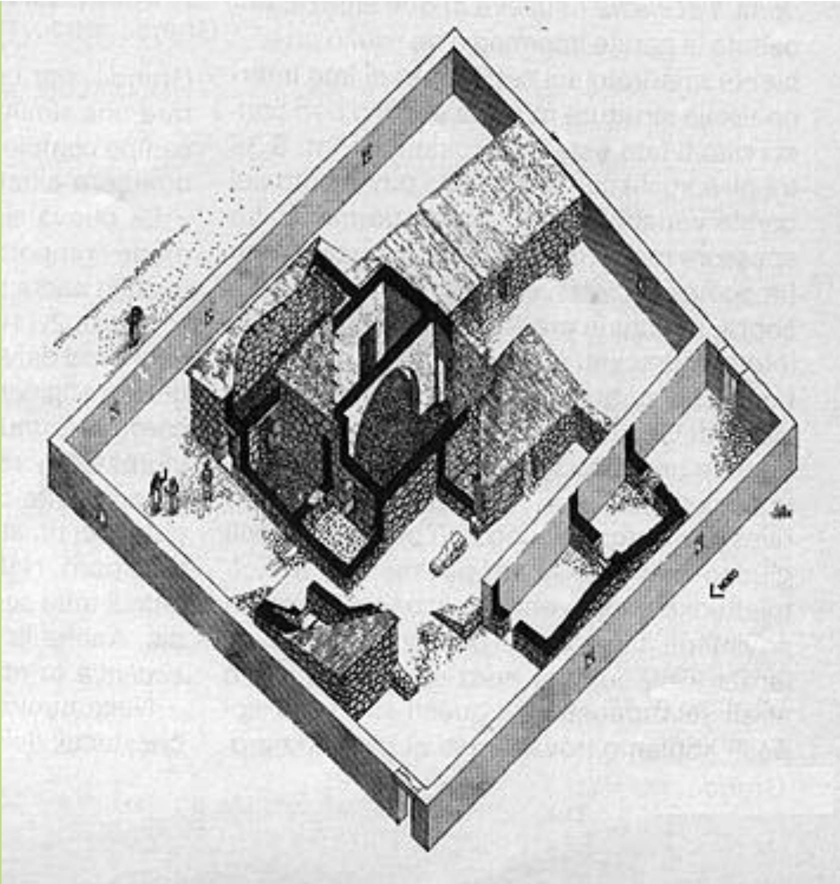
This precious material was studied and published by Fr. E. Testa. Although the interpretation of the inscriptions is far from easy, due to the fragmentary and precarious state of preservation, yet some very important conclusions are beyond any reasonable doubt.

The Christian character of the domus-ecclesia is clearly vindicated. In fact the name and the monogram of Jesus occur in several graffiti. Jesus is called the Lord, Christ, the Most High, God. Some liturgical expressions, such as Amen,

Kyrie eleison, etc. are also present. A fairly long inscription in Paleo-Estrangelo seems to refer to the Eucharist. The plurality of languages strongly suggests that the domus-ecclesia was visited not simply by local worshipers, but by pilgrims as well. On palaeographic grounds, the graffiti can be dated from the beginning of the third century to the early fifth century A.D. This conclusion, coupled with the late first century plastered pavements previously described, suggests that room n. 1 was changed into a domus-ecclesia by the first generations of Christians in Capharnaum.

The cult centred of course on the person of Jesus. Yet, it is not surprising to find some graffiti bearing the name of Peter. From the strictly archaeological point of view, the enlarged domus-ecclesia of the fourth century constitutes a unique discovery. It is a tripartite structure having the atrium to the E and the focal point to the W; furthermore the building is set apart from the rest of town by an enclosure wall. These basic elements are strongly reminiscent of the general plan of the Temple in Jerusalem. Such similarities cannot be interpreted as accidental, especially when we think that Christians from Jewish stock lived in Capharnaum in the first four centuries of the Christian era.

The fourth century domus-ecclesia was described by Egeria in these terms: "In Capharnaum autem ex domo apostolorum principis ecclesia facta est, cuius parietes usque hodie ita stant, sicut fuerunt", i. e. "The house of the prince of the Apostles (St. Peter) in Capharnaum was changed into a church; the walls, however, (of that house) are still standing as they were (in the past)". This precious passage of Egeria reached us through Petrus Diaconus (1137) and is important for several reasons. Egeria does not speak of a common church, but of a house changed into a church. To stress this point, Egeria underlines the fact that the walls of the old house were still standing as in the past. Secondly, this change of a private house into a place for religious gatherings took place in the past (facta est). Finally the house converted into a church was nothing less than the house of the prince of the Apostles, i. e. of Simon Peter. Nobody can miss the striking accuracy of Egeria's description in the light of our archaeological discoveries.



Transformed house of Peter in a domus-ecclesiae

Chapter 2

Chapter 2. Further ministry in Capernaum

2:1-12. Healing the paralytic

2:13-22. Calling Matthew

2: 23-28. The Servant and the Sabbath

*1. The Servant again in Capernaum. The healing of the Paralytic. (*Mark 2:1-12. Matthew 9:1-8*;* Luke 5:17-26.*)*

*2. Levi called. With the Publicans and Sinners. (*Mark 2:13-17. Matthew 9:9-13*;* Luke 5:27-32.*)*

*3. The Question concerning Fasting. (*Mark 2:18-22. Matthew 9:14-15*;* Luke 5:33-39.*)*

*4. The Question concerning the Sabbath. (*Mark 2:23-28. Matthew 12:1-8*;* Luke 6:1-5.*)*

1. The Servant again in Capernaum. The healing of the Paralytic., Mark 2:1-12.

His second visit to Capernaum brought out a large multitude. We see Him occupied with preaching the Word. He always preached the Word first, to make known the Truth; for this He had come (Mark 1:38). Then in the next place He confirmed His Word by His mighty works. The Paralytic tells of man's impotence; leprosy is the type of Sin as a defiling, incurable disease, paralysis shows man's helpless condition. The paralytic is likewise the picture of Israel. The helpless paralytic is brought into the presence of the Lord. Mark alone tells us that four carried him and describes fully the obstacles in the way. They had faith in His love and in His power. How it must have refreshed His heart! As His servants we can still bring sinners into His presence and honor Him by our confidence. "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." With this blessed Word He touches the root of all evil. To deal with it He had come. The proof that He is Jehovah and has power to forgive sins is the healing of the paralytic. Love and Power are here blessedly manifested. Love in forgiveness, power in healing and restoration. It is ever repeated in the case of every believing sinner. The two great elements of the Gospel are here. In some future day converted Israel will know this (Psalms 103:1-3).

2. Levi called. With the Publicans and Sinners., Mark 2:13-17.

Levi, the son of Alphaeus, is Matthew, the writer of the first Gospel. He was a tax gatherer. As such he was despised by the nation Israel. Not alone were they considered thieves, but they were the miserable hirelings of the Romans and as such hated as Apostates. What Grace to call such an one to the office of an Apostle! And the feast which followed reveals both the loving condescension of the Servant-Son and His Grace to seek that which is lost. The Servant had taken a low place by associating with the tax-gatherers. In the eyes of the self-righteous Pharisees it was an abomination. God in the person of His Son had come in Love and Grace seeking man.

3. The Question concerning Fasting. Mark 2:18-22.

The disciples of John approach Him next with a question. The Servant's ear was always ready to listen to the perplexities, difficulties and sorrows of others. He was always approachable. Under the Law they fasted. The Grace of God had now appeared and Grace was soon to take the place of the Law. He Himself is

the Bridegroom. No need of fasting and mourning while He was with them. His rejection would come and with it their fasting. A significant parable follows. The old garment and the old wineskins are symbolic of Judaism with its laws and ceremonies. The new piece and the new wine stand for the Gospel. Law and Grace must not be mixed. If the Gospel of Grace, the new wine, is put into the old wineskins, Judaism with its laws, the wineskins go to pieces and the new wine is spilled. Much in Christendom today is neither Law nor Grace. The Servant announced a change of dispensations.

4. The Question concerning the Sabbath. Mark 2:23-28.

The question concerning the Sabbath is closely connected with the preceding parable. The Sabbath, not a seventh day, but the seventh day, was the day on which God rested in Creation. It was also the sign of His covenant with His people Israel. Plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath to eat them is nowhere forbidden in the Law. It was one of the hard and burdensome man-made traditional injunctions. The Lord cites David's case. Mark adds that David was not alone hungry, but "he had need." David, though anointed King, was despised and in need. His greater Son and His disciples were in the same condition. What is greater with God, the maintenance of an ordinance or the need of Man? Surely the latter. He, the humble Servant, was none other than the Lord of the Sabbath. He had rested in His Creation work and instituted the Sabbath for His people. He had become the Son of Man for the need of Man. As the Lord of the Sabbath He speaks, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." On the ground of Grace the Sabbath no longer exists. We have the Lord's day, the first day of the week to enjoy communion with our risen and glorified Lord, resting from our daily occupation. Blessed privilege to adore Him on that day and to follow His own example of doing good.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3. The Servant further displays His deity

Verses 1-12. Man with the withered hand healed

Verses 13-19. The choosing of the twelve

Verses 20-30. The unpardonable sin

Verses 31-35. The Servant's new relationship

*1. In the synagogue. The man with the withered hand healed. (*Mark 3:1-6. Matthew 12:9-14*;* Luke 6:6-11.*)*

*2. The Withdrawal of the Servant. Many healed. (*Mark 3:7-12. Matthew 12:15-21*;* Luke 6:17-19.*)*

*3. On the Mountain calling the Twelve. (*Mark 3:13-19. Matthew 10:1-4*;* Luke 6:12-16.*)*

*4. The interrupted meal. (*Mark 3:20.*)*

*5. The Servant charged with madness. (*Mark 3:21.*)*

*6. The Blasphemy of the Scribes; His Warning. (*Mark 3:22-30. Matthew 12:22-32*;* Luke 11:14-23.*)*

*7. Old relationship disowned and a new relationship announced. (*Mark 3:31-35. Matthew 13:46-50*;* Luke 8:19-21.*)*

1. In the Synagogue. The Man with the withered hand healed. Mark 3:1-6

This incident stands in closest relation to the preceding chapter. In their blindness they watched Him, if He would heal on the Sabbath. "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do evil; to save life or to kill?" He answered the question by healing the sufferer. Note the addition by Mark, which is not found elsewhere. "When He had looked round about them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." It was a righteous wrath when He saw them in their wicked and wilful hardness. His service was rendered in the deepest emotions of His holy soul. He did good, but Pharisees and Herodians were ready to destroy Him.

2. The withdrawal of the Servant. Many healed. Mark 3:7-12

The sudden departure of the Lord is not without meaning. Not alone did He withdraw Himself from the hatred of the Pharisees and Herodians to continue His ministry of love and power elsewhere, but His withdrawal indicates that the nation Israel was to be set aside dispensationally. He withdrew Himself to the sea. The sea is symbolical of the Gentile nations. Again they crowd about Him--a great multitude from the border land of the Gentiles (Tyre and Sidon). Satan's power was likewise manifested. Unclean spirits, when they saw Him, fell down before Him. These were demon possessed persons. They had to own and confess the Glory of the Servant. But He did not want their witness and forbade them to make Him known.

3. On the Mountain calling the Twelve. Mark 3:13-15

In Matthew we find all these events and actions of our Lord in a different setting. In vain do we look in our Gospel for the Sermon on the Mount. It is not reported and only given in full in the Gospel of Matthew. The Sermon on the Mount is the proclamation of the King concerning His Kingdom. Mark, describing Him as the ministering One, had to omit the utterances of the King. If we look for a place in Mark where the Sermon on the Mount belongs chronologically, it is at this point. For the peculiar arrangement of the events in the Gospel of Matthew see "Exposition of Matthew." He ordained the twelve to be with Him and endowed with supernatural power to be sent forth by Him. In Luke we read He prayed all night. The calling of the Twelve was for the extension of His loving ministry. Notice also the giving of names. "Boanerges" for the sons of Zebedee is only found here.

4. The interrupted Meal., Mark 3:20

This is likewise mentioned by Mark exclusively (see Mark 6:31). It shows that the Servant was ever ready to minister, forgetting his own physical need.

5. The Servant charged with madness., Mark 3:21

This is also a characteristic statement in Mark's Gospel. It shows that His own relations were ashamed of Him. They looked upon Him as being out of His mind. Thus His perfect service of love, the untiring labor, never ceasing toil, was judged by them.

6. The Blasphemy of the Scribes. His Warning., Mark 3:22-30

Still worse, the Jerusalem Scribes attributed His Divine power to Satan. What an awful accusation! They could not deny the power, but refused to believe that it was the power of God. Under Satanic impulses they called the Holy Spirit a demon power. But the perfect wisdom of the Lord silenced their blasphemy. The power He manifested was a power in the most blessed mercy to man, the prey of Satan and his demons. If it were Satan's power then his kingdom is divided. This is the unpardonable sin. No forgiveness for this sin. The words "is in danger of eternal damnation" are better rendered by "is guilty of an eternal sin" (see 1911 Bible).

7. The Old Relationship disowned and a new Relationship announced., Mark 3:31-35.

He refused to see His relations. This refusal indicates the broken relationship with Israel. He no longer recognizes His own, and speaks of a new relationship, founded upon obedience to the will of His Father. It was spoken in anticipation of the present dispensation.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4. The Servant's seaside teaching

Verses 1-29. The parable of the sower

Verses 30-34. The parable of the mustard seed

Verses 35-41. The Servant and the storm

*1. Teaching by the Seaside. The Parable of the Sower. (*Mark 4:1-20. Matthew 13:1-23*;* Luke 8:4-15.*)*

*2. The Word to shine forth in testimony. (*Mark 4:21-25. Luke 8:16-18.*)*

*3. The Parable of the Growth of the Seed and the Harvest. (*Mark 4:26-29.*)*

*4. The Parable of the Mustard Seed. (*Mark 4:30-34. Matthew 13:31-35*;* Luke 13:18-19.*)*

*5. The Storm on the sea and the wind rebuked. (*Mark 4:35-41. Matthew 8:23-27*;* Luke 8:22-25.*)*

1. Teaching by the Seaside. The Parable of the Sower., Mark 4:1-20

In the Gospel of Matthew the scene which closes the preceding chapter is followed by the seven parables (Matthew 13:1-58). In the seven parable discourse the Lord teaches the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven in its present form. These parables belong into the first Gospel because it is the Gospel of the King. First He proclaimed the principles of the Kingdom (Matthew 5:1-48; Matthew 6:1-34; Matthew 7:1-29); then after His rejection He taught in parables the Kingdom in mystery. Only two of these parables are reported by Mark, the parable of the Sower and of the Mustard Seed. Both relate to His work of ministry. Another parable, however, is added, which is found nowhere else in the Gospels.

The parable of the Sower is explained by Himself (Mark 4:13-20). He Himself is the great Sower and His fellow servants sow after Him. That which is sown is

the Word, even as He came to preach the Word. The devil, the flesh and the world are the hindering forces.

The Parable of the Sower is very simple. It is also noteworthy that Mark adds a sentence, which is not found elsewhere. “Know ye not this parable? And how then will ye be acquainted with all parables?” It is a fundamental parable and a key to other parables. He graciously explains it. What patience He had with His dull fellow servants! He is the Sower. That which is sown is the Word; for this He came. Man cannot bring any fruit. That which He sows can produce fruit. The devil, the flesh and the world are antagonistic to the Word and the causes of failure and unfruitfulness. Those who hear the Word and receive it (believe) yield fruit. But the devil, the flesh and the world are even then active and influence fruitbearing.

2. The Word to shine forth in testimony., Mark 4:21-25

The Word received in faith gives life and yields fruit. It must also shine forth in testimony. This testimony may be obscured by “the bushel and the bed.” The bushel stands for the cares and material things of this present age; the bed for ease and comfort. The cure for occupation with earthly things and for an ease-loving life, the hindrances of a bright shining testimony, is to remember the coming day of manifestation (Mark 4:22). How bright and perfect the example of the Servant. He did not know the bushel nor the bed.

3. The Parable of the Growth of the seed and the Harvest., Mark 4:26-29

This parable is not recorded by any of the other evangelists. It is closely linked with the words which precede. The day of manifestation is the day of the harvest. The seed sown grows in secret. None knows how. Life is in the Word. The blade, the ear and the full corn, after that the harvest. This is the comforting assurance of the Servant. He sowed the seed and then “slept and rose”--He died and rose from the dead. In view of it He could rejoice in the knowledge that the seed would spring up, increase and bring a harvest. And the sower will put in the sickle. The harvest (the end of the age) is more fully revealed in Matthew 13:1-58. What was His comfort is the comfort of all His true servants who sow the word.

4. The Parable of the Mustard Seed., Mark 4:30-34

The unexpected growth of the Kingdom during the absence of the Sower is taught in this parable. In Matthew it is linked with the parable of the leaven. The external growth (mustard seed) and the internal corruption (leaven) of Christianity are foretold by Him. Christendom has developed into a powerful

world institution and become the lodging place of the fowls of the air. These typify unclean beings (Mark 4:4, Mark 4:15). The humble Servant never meant the Word to produce such an abnormal growth.

5. The Storm on the Lake and the Wind rebuked., Mark 4:35-41

The close of the chapter fits in beautifully with the whole. The Servant is seen in chapter 4 as the rejected One. He is sowing the seed. He leaves the earth while the seed groweth unto the harvest. The storm on the lake gives the picture of the trials and dangers of His own during this age; but He is in the ship. Note a statement peculiar to Mark. "They took Him even as He was in the ship." The Servant, though Lord of all, had a real human body. Here we have a little picture of His weariness as Servant. Yet what a scene! He had perfect rest in the midst of the storm while His disciples were unbelieving. And then He manifested His power in rebuking the wind.

"Reader, do you think that the power of the Son of God and God's counsels could have failed because of an unexpected storm? Impossible! The disciples were in the same boat with Jesus. Here is a lesson for us. In all the difficulties and dangers of the Christian life, during the whole journey upon the waves, often agitated by the tempestuous sea of life, we are always in the same boat with Jesus, if we are doing His will. It may seem to us that He is sleeping; nevertheless, if He allows the tempest to rise in order to prove our faith, we shall not perish since we are with Him in the storm; evidently neither He or we can perish. His security is our own."

Chapter 5

5:1-20. The Servant's power over Satan

5:21-43. The Servant's power over disease and death

*1. The Servant's Power over Satan's work. (*Mark 5:1-20. Matthew 8:28-34*;* Luke 8:26-39.*)*

*2. The Servant's Power over disease and death. (*Mark 5:21-43. Matthew 9:18-26*;* Luke 8:40-56.*)*

1. The Servant's Power over Satan's work., Mark 5:1-20

The Storm on the Lake was the work of Satan, but here the power of the enemy is more prominent. The description of the demoniac differs from Matthew's and Luke's account. His condition is described in fullest detail. He dwelt in the place

of the dead. No one could chain him; Satan's dominion and power cannot be conquered by the effort of man. Then there is self-torture and delusion in thinking of Christ as a tormentor. The complete identification of the legion of demons with this poor victim is seen in Mark 5:9. The power of the Lord delivers the man. This miserable world is still in the thraldom of Satan and his legion of demons. Demon possessions have not ceased. And the Lord Jesus Christ is still the same. The demons enter the swine by their own request and when granted the herd of swine rushed to destruction. This is an evidence of the character of the devil. He is the murderer from the beginning. But oh! the blessed change which had come for the demoniac. Delivered completely, in the attitude of rest, no longer rushing to and fro in torment, his nakedness covered and in his right mind. These are still the results of salvation. He would remain in constant fellowship with His deliverer. But the Servant demands service--and He announces directly what the Lord had done for Him. This is still the blessed privilege of all who have been delivered. They asked the Servant, with His loving Power to save to the uttermost, to leave their coast. "When the presence of God is felt, it is more terrible than that of Satan. Man would wish to free himself from the latter, but cannot; but the presence of God is insupportable when it makes itself felt, and indeed man has driven God (in the person of Christ) out of this world." It shows once more the rejection of the Servant.

2. The Servant's Power over disease and death., Mark 5:21-43

And now He manifests Power over disease and death. The daughter of Jairus was sick unto death. The willing Servant responds at once to the request of her father. While on the way the poor, suffering woman touches the hem of His garment. Mark 5:26 is found only in Mark. The Lord knows the touch of faith and healing power goes forth from Him. She is healed. The sick daughter had died, but the Lord raised her up. All has its blessed spiritual and dispensational lessons. Man is dead in trespasses and sins but One has power to give life and raise the dead. Faith is beautifully illustrated in the woman who touched Him. Jairus' daughter represents Israel. The Lord will come again into this earthly scene and then will call the remnant of Israel to spiritual and national life. The woman, so hopeless, so helpless, suffering and getting worse, is typical of the Gentiles. The hand of faith can touch Him still. In Mark 5:43 we see once more how the Servant loved secrecy and despised ostentatiousness.

Chapters 6-7. The Servant's rejection

6:1-6. In his hometown

6:7-13. He sends forth the twelve

6:14-29. John the Baptist's martyrdom described

6:30-44. Miracle of the five thousand fed

6:45-52. Miracle of walking on the water

6:53-56. Healings at Gennesaret

7:1-23. The empty religionism of the Pharisees

7:24-30. The Servant and the Syrophoenician

7:31-37. The healing of the deaf and dumb man

Chapter 6

*1. The Servant rejected in Nazareth. (*Mark 6:1-6. Matthew 13:54-58*;* Luke 4:16-30*)*

*2. The Servant sends forth the Twelve. (*Mark 6:7-13. Matthew 10:5-15*;* Luke 9:1-6*)*

*3. King Herod troubled. (*Mark 6:14-16. Matthew 14:1-2*;* Luke 9:7-9*)*

*4. The Martyrdom of John. (*Mark 6:17-29. Matthew 14:3-12*)*

*5. The Servant's withdrawal for Rest. (*Mark 6:30-31. Luke 9:10-11*)*

*6. The feeding of the Five Thousand. (*Mark 6:32-44. Matthew 14:13-21*;* Luke 9:12-17*;* John 6:1-13*)*

*7. The Servant alone and His Return walking on the waters. (*Mark 6:45-52. Matthew 14:22-32*;* John 6:15-21*)*

*8. New Manifestations of His love and Power. (*Mark 6:53-56. Matthew 14:34-36.*)*

1. The Servant rejected at Nazareth., Mark 6:1-6

Once more we find Him in Nazareth. The first thing is teaching, and though they were astonished at His wisdom and power, they did not own Him as the Lord, but called Him the Carpenter and were offended in Him. Such is the heart of

man. Unbelief tied His hands, yet in Love He healed a few and marvelled because of their unbelief. But did He abandon them? Oh! the infinite patience and seeking Grace of this perfect Servant! “He went round about the villages teaching,” if perchance faith might yet respond to His willingness and power to heal.

2. The Servant sends forth the Twelve., Mark 6:7-13

Now He sends His Apostles forth and endows them with power. They are to depend in their ministry upon Himself. Thus they were to be His followers for He was ever dependent on God. Blessed principles are here which still hold good, though the sending forth had a special meaning for Israel (see Matthew 10:5-15).

3. King Herod troubled., Mark 6:14-16

It is the story of a troubled conscience and fear produces the thought that it is John the Baptist risen from the dead.

4. The Martyrdom of John., Mark 6:17-29

The faithful herald of the Servant suffered martyrdom. In the whole sickening scene of lust and bloodshed the prince of this world, the god of this age is manifested in this awful rule and power. It is a picture of the present age in opposition to God. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life hold sway. And this evil age is not gradually improved and getting better, It is not abandoning its lusts and pride, its hatred of God and His Christ. As long as Satan is the ruler the age must be evil. In such a scene the Holy One came to minister and to give His life.

5. The Servant’s withdrawal for Rest., Mark 6:30-31

We have noticed different withdrawals of the Lord. He withdrew for prayer and to the sea and now when the Apostles gathered unto Him, the One to whom the fellow servants must ever gather, to give a report of what they had done and taught, He withdrew with them into a desert place. The Lord does not say anything about their success (Mark 6:13). There was danger of the self-exaltation of the messengers. The silence of the Lord puts a check upon it. It was His own power, which in goodness and mercy had done all this. Instead we hear Him say, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile.” This again is found nowhere but in Mark. How needful for all servants it is to heed this loving word. How easily in constant service a servant can be lifted up and attribute something to himself. True service only is possible by being occupied

with the Lord. And therefore we must ever learn to seek the presence of God. He remembered the need of His messengers and the time of rest with Him gave them new strength.

6. The Feeding of the Five Thousand., Mark 6:32-44

Here we have the compassion of the Servant in remembering the physical need of the people. But before He supplied that need, "He began to teach them many things." The Word stands always first. He came to serve. The giving of the Word followed by the works of goodness and power is the order maintained in His service. Note the contrast between Him and the request of the disciples. How untiring, loving, gracious He was in all His service for man. May we learn of Him. A comparison of the account of this miracle in the four Gospels will teach us many lessons. He feeds the poor with bread (Psalms 132:15) as the true Shepherd of His people. He is the miraculous giver, but He uses His disciples in dispensing His blessing. His power for the good of others is at the believer's disposal. And the little put into His hands was not only sufficient for all but more was left over than they had given to Him. And still He delights to take the little things and manifest through them His power, if we but trust Him.

7. The Servant alone and His Return walking on the Waters., Mark 6:45-52

All is full of blessed meaning. He is once more alone in the mountain to pray. His disciples are alone on the stormy sea. He is absent now and has sent the people (Israel) away. He is in the presence of God as our intercessor. The stormy sea with the contrary wind is a type of this present age. Trouble and perplexity is the lot of His disciples during His absence. About the fourth watch of the night He came unto them walking upon the sea. Mark does not mention Peter going forth to meet Him. They see Him coming, but do not recognize Him, believing Him a spirit. His loving voice soon assures them, "Be of good cheer; it is I, be not afraid." Thus He will return across the stormy sea to meet and deliver His own. Blessed are we if we ever behold Him as the mighty One, who is above all circumstances and if we hear His words of comfort. How He cares for us. And when He comes the wind will cease.

8. New Manifestations of His Love and Power., Mark 6:53-56

What a scene of toil! What ministry in doing good! Dispensationally it stands for the blessed time, yet in store for this world, when He comes again. Then He who was the Son of Man in humiliation will, as Son of Man, with power and glory, be known to all. Then the earth will be blessed as Gennesaret was.

Demonism

Demons in the Gospel of Mark

Chapter 1:12-13

After Jesus was baptized He entered a wilderness and Satan tempted him for 40 days.

Chapter 1:23-28

While teaching a man demon possessed confronts Jesus. The demon seems to know who Jesus is and knows that He has come to destroy the work of the demons. Jesus orders the demon to be quiet and to get out of the man. The demon throws the man into spasms and yells loud and leaves.

Chapter 1:32-34

People brought Jesus evil inflicted people. There were enough people that they lined up the door. Jesus released the demon oppressed people and gave orders to the demons not to reveal His true identity.

Chapter 3 11:24

Evil spirits would confront Jesus telling Him He was the Son of God. Jesus would shut them up and forbade them to speak in public

Chapter 3:13-19

Jesus gave authority to His disciples to banish demons

Chapter 5:1-20

Jesus arrives at a sea country called Gerasenes. A mad man comes from a graveyard. He possessed strong strength as no one could restrain him and he would break chains. The man would scream and cut himself night and day. The man himself wanted to worship, but the demons protested. Jesus demanded to know there name (Mob). They begged Jesus to go into a herd of pigs (at which Jesus allowed). The pigs then stampeded into the sea killing themselves. The man now put on descent clothes and was in his right mind. The man wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus told him to stay in this area and preach his testimony and he did.

Chapter 6: 17-20

Herod (possibly demon possessed) was drawn to listen to John the Baptist but when he did he was overcome with guilt and was miserable.

Chapter 8:32-33

After Jesus reveals that He is going to be killed, Peter protests to Jesus, and Jesus tells Peter to "Get behind me Satan!"

Chapter 9: 17-29

A man comes to Jesus who has a son who has a demon that causes his son to be mute. The demon throws the boy to the ground foaming at the mouth and grinding his teeth and the boy becomes very stiff. The disciples could not cast out the demon. Jesus becomes frustrated with His disciples. The man reveals that the demon has been tormenting his son since he was a little boy and that the demon has thrown the son into fires or rivers to kill him. Jesus then seeing the crowd gave orders that the "deaf" and "dumb" spirit would leave the boy. The demon screamed and caused the boy to thrash about and left. The people thought the boy was dead as he was as pale as a corpse. However Jesus helped the boy up. Afterword the disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon. Jesus revealed that the only way to get rid of the demon was through prayer.

Chapter 9:39-41 John the disciple tells Jesus that they saw a man using Jesus' name to drive out demons and they stopped him as the man was not in their group. Jesu becomes upset telling them that they need to allow this kind of thing. He reveals that people who are doing this kind of thing (using Christ's name) are allies.

Expulsion of demons – Specific instances

Mk. 1:21-28: Lk.4:31-47. Demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum

Mt. 9:32-34. Dumb demoniac

Mt. 15:21-28; Mk. 7:24-30. Daughter of the Syrophoenician

Mt. 8:28-34; Mk. 5:1-20; Lk. 8:26-39. Gadarene

demoniacs
Mt. 12:22; Lk. 11.14. Blind and mute demoniac.

Mt. 17:14-21; Mk. 9:14-29; Lk 9:37-43. Epileptic child

Chapter 7

*1. The Opposition of the Pharisees. (*Mark 7:1-23. Matthew 15:1-20*)*

*2. Grace shown to the Syrophenician Woman. (*Mark 7:24-30. Matthew 15:21-28*)*

*3. The healing of the deaf man. (*Mark 7:31-37. Matthew 15:29-31.*)*

1. The Opposition of the Pharisees., Mark 7:1-23

This paragraph is of much importance. The scope of the analysis forbids a full annotation, but we refer the reader to the exposition of Matthew 15:1-20, the parallel passage. The Servant in His divine wisdom uncovers the hypocrisy which lies underneath the traditions of the elders. He shows that the Pharisees had rejected the commandment of God for the sake of men-made inventions and traditions. Their ritualistic service founded upon tradition was dishonoring to God and His Word. Such ritualism springing from tradition must always be. He condemns religiousness, which knows nothing of heart obedience and holiness of life. And this outward, human, man-made religion, which boasts of being something and doing something, He condemns. Then He shows that man's defilement does not consist in what enters into him, but the things which come out of him. He shows what man is within (Mark 7:21-23). No, mere religiousness cannot take away this defilement. Thus He uncovers the hypocrisy of an outward religion and the true state of the heart of man. The product of the natural heart of man, though it may delight in religious observances, is nothing but vileness.

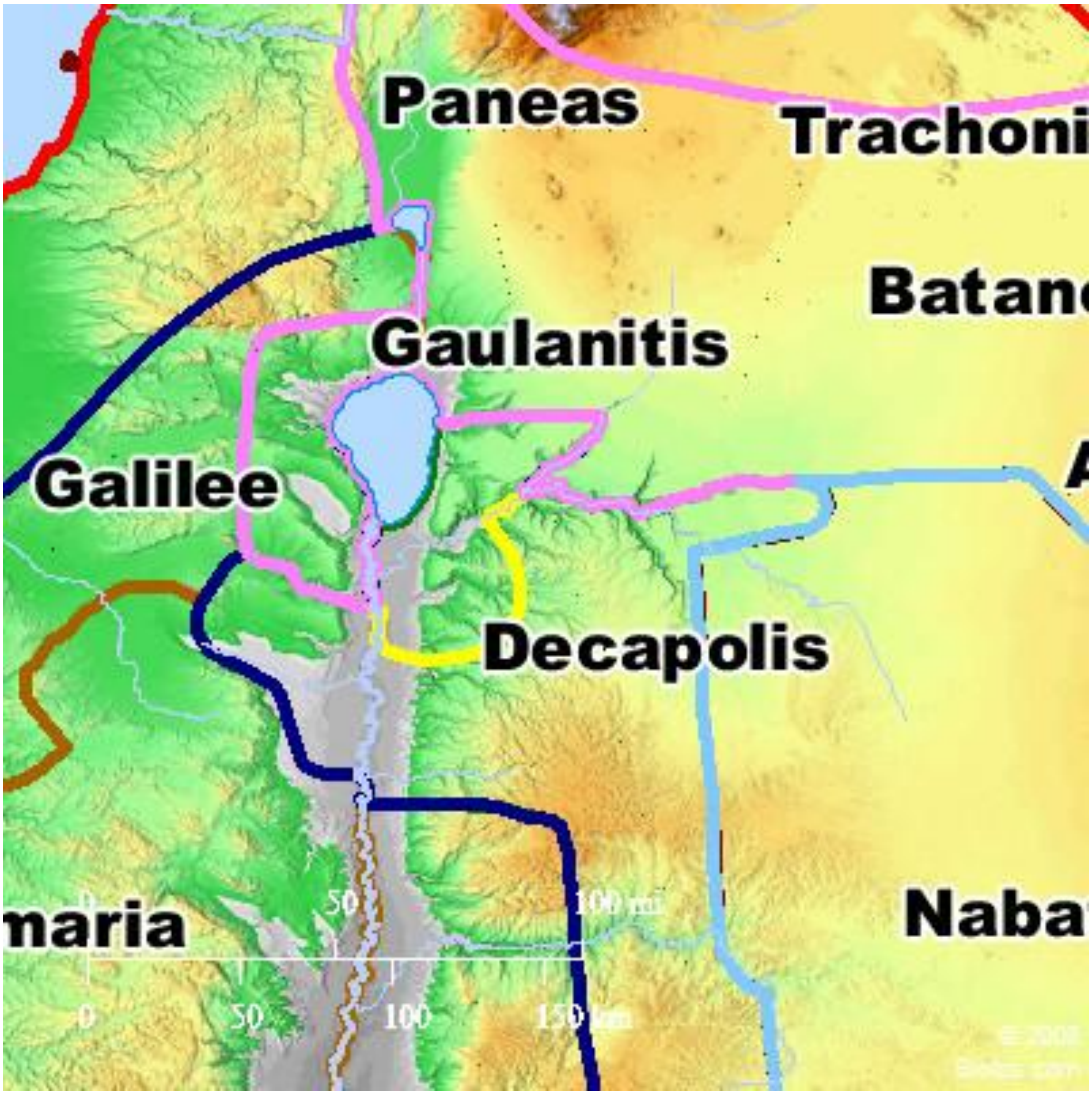
2. Grace shown to the Syrophenician Woman., Mark 7:24-30

While the omniscient Lord in the form of the Servant showed what the heart of man is, He now also uncovers His own heart in showing Grace to one, who belonged to the Gentiles. In the borders of Tyre and Sidon the blessed Servant sought quietness and entered a house; but He could not be hid. Note again that Mark mentions this exclusively, because it brings out His character as Servant. He also informs us that she was a Gentile, a Syrophenician, belonging to the

enemies of God's people, Israel. But Mark leaves out Matthew's statement, that she appealed to Him as "Son of David." Matthew's Gospel is the proper place for that. What evidences all along we find of the inspiration of these records. She had no claim on His Mercy and Power, for she was under the curse. Her daughter had a demon. And though she had no claim on His power and no promise, she believed in His love. She takes the place He gave to her and the daughter was restored. What a manifestation of Grace! And how it must have cheered the Servant's heart! In that moment His omniscient eye must have beheld the multitudes of Gentiles, who, after His death on the Cross, as lost sinners with no promise, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, would believe in His love.

3. The healing of the deaf man., Mark 7:31-37

A comparison with Matthew shows that the account here is peculiar to Mark's Gospel. In Matthew 15:29-31 we find the dumb man mentioned among others whom He healed. He represents Israel. Altogether deaf, unable to hear God's voice, which spoke through the One who had come and an impediment in speech. They attempted to speak of God and praise God. And such is man's natural state. And such He came to heal. Israel might have had the ear opened by Him, the Servant, whose ear was always open, and Israel might have the tongue loosed, to praise His Name. He heals the afflicted one. And how the Servant looked to heaven and groaned. What must He have felt!



Archaeological light: The Decapolis

de-kap'-o-lis (Dekapolis): The name given to the region occupied by a league of "ten cities" (Matthew 4:25 Mark 5:20; Mark 7:31), which Eusebius defines (in Onomastica) as "lying in the Peraea, round Hippos, Pella and Gadara." Such combinations of Greek cities arose as Rome assumed dominion in the East, to promote their common interests in trade and commerce, and for mutual protection against the peoples surrounding them.

This particular league seems to have been constituted about the time of Pompey's campaign in Syria, 65 B.C., by which several cities in Decapolis dated their eras. They were independent of the local tetrarchy, and answerable directly to the governor of Syria. They enjoyed the rights of association and

asylum; they struck their own coinage, paid imperial taxes and were liable to military service (Ant., XIV, iv, 4; BJ, I, vii, 7; II, xviii, 3; III, ix, 7; Vita, 65, 74). Of the ten cities, Scythopolis, the ancient Bethshean, alone, the capital of the league, was on the West side of Jordan. The names given by Pliny (NH, v.18) are Scythopolis (Beisan), Hippos (Susiyeh), Gadara (Umm Qeis), Pella (Fahil), Philadelphia (`Amman), Gerasa (Jerash), Dion (Adun?), Canatha (Qanawat), Damascus and Raphana. The last named is not identified, and Dion is uncertain. Other cities joined the league, and Ptolemy, who omits Raphans, gives a list of 18. The Greek inhabitants were never on good terms with the Jews; and the herd of swine (Mark 5:11) indicates contempt for what was probably regarded as Jewish prejudice. The ruins still seen at Gadara, but especially at Kanawat (see KENATH) and Jerash, of temples, theaters and other public buildings, attest the splendor of these cities in their day.

Occurrences

Matthew 4:25 Great multitudes from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan followed him.

Mark 5:20 He went his way, and began to proclaim in Decapolis how Jesus had done great things for him, and everyone marveled.

Mark 7:31 Again he departed from the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and came to the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the region of Decapolis.

Miracles in the Gospels

Miracles With Individuals	Matt.	Mark	Luke	John
Two blind men healed	Mt 9:27, 28, 29, 30, 31			
A dumb demoniac healed	Mt 9:32-34			
Coin in the mouth of the fish	Mt 17:24, 25, 26, 27			

The deaf and dumb man healed		Mk 7:31-37		
A blind man healed		Mk 8:22-26		
Draught of fish			Lk 5:4-7	
Raising the widow’s son			Lk 7:11-18	
Healing the woman with an infirmity			Lk 13:10-17	
Healing the man with the dropsy			Lk 14:1-6	
Healing the ten lepers			Lk 17:11-19	
Healing the nobleman’s son of fever				Jn 4:46-54
Healing the impotent man at Bethesda				Jn 5:1-9
Healing the man born blind				Jn 9:1-41
Draught of fish				Jn 21:4-6
Healing the daughter of the Syrophoenician	Mt 15:21-28	Mk 7:24-30		
Healing the centurion’s servant of palsy	Mt 8:5-13		Lk 7:1-10	
The blind and dumb demoniac	Mt 12:22-23			

			Lk 11:14-15	
The demoniac in a synagogue		Mk 1:23-28	Lk 4:33-37	
Healing of Jairus' daughter	Mt 9:18-26	Mk 5:21-43	Lk 8:40-56	
Healing the woman with an issue of blood	Mt 9:20-22	Mk 5:25-34	Lk 8:43-48	
Healing the man sick of the palsy	Mt 9:1-8	Mk 2:1-12	Lk 5:17-26	
Healing the leper	Mt 8:1-4	Mk 1:40-45	Lk 5:12-14	
Healing Peter's mother-in-law	Mt 8:14-15	Mk 1:29-31	Lk 4:38-39	
Healing the man with the withered hand	Mt 12:9-13	Mk 3:1-5	Lk 6:6-11	
Healing the demoniac child	Mt 17:14-21	Mk 9:14-27	Lk 9:37-43	
Healing the blind Bartimaeus	Mt 20:29-34	Mk 10:46-52	Lk 18:35-43	
Totals	**14**	**12**	**16**	**4**

Christ Alone Miracles	Matt.	Mark	Luke	John
When Christ passed unseen through the multitude			Lk 4:28-30	
Turning water into wine				Jn 2:1-11

Raising of Lazarus				Jn 11:1-44
Healing the ear of Malchus, servant of the high priest			Lk 22:50-51	
Feeding the four thousand	Mt 15:32-3	Mk 8:1-9		
Cursing the fig tree	Mt 21:17-20	Mk 11:12-14		
Stilling the storm	Mt 8:23-27	Mk 4:35-43	Lk 8:22-25	
The legion of devils entering the swine	Mt 8:28-34	Mk 5:1-15	Lk 8:26-36	
Walking on the sea	Mt 14:22-33	Mk 6:45-52		Jn 6:16-21
Feeding the five thousand	Mt 14:15-21	Mk 6:32-44	Lk 9:11-17	Jn 6:1-13

Chapter 8

8.The Servant predicts His death

Verses 1-9. Miracle of feeding the four thousand

Verses 10-21. The wicked unbelief of the Pharisees

Verses 22-26. The blind man healed at Bethsaida

Verses 27-38. Peter's confession of faith

Verses 1-38

*1. The feeding of the Four Thousand. (*Mark 8:1-9. Matthew 15:32-39*)*

*2. The Pharisees ask a sign. (*Mark 8:10-13. Matthew 16:1-4*)*

*3. The Warning against the leaven of the Pharisees. (*Mark 8:14-21. Matthew 16:5-12.*)*

*4. The healing of the blind man. (*Mark 8:22-26*)*

*5. Peter's Confession. (*Mark 8:27-30. Matthew 16:13-16*;* Luke 9:18-20*)*

*6. The first announcement of His coming rejection and death. (*Mark 8:31-33. Matthew 16:21-23*;* Luke 9:22*)*

*7. His Disciples to follow in His path. The Coming Glory. (*Mark 8:34-38. Matthew 16:24-28*;* Luke 9:23-27*)*

1. The Feeding of the Four Thousand., Mark 8:1-9

The compassion and loving care of Him who came to minister is once more seen. Again He meets the need of the multitude in a miraculous way. But here we have seven loaves and seven baskets are left over. It points clearly to the manifestation of Divine power, for the number seven occurs twice. He in His great goodness and great power is sufficient to meet all human need. The miracle foreshadows the great and perfect blessings of the coming Kingdom age.

2. The Pharisees ask a sign., Mark 8:10-13

Though the religious leaders had seen so many signs and display of Divine goodness and power they asked a sign from heaven. Unbelief ever looks for something new and is never satisfied. Their request may be looked upon as a temptation. He could have shown a sign from heaven, but with it He would have left the humble path of the Servant. "He sighed deeply," which is another phrase peculiar to Mark's account, showing His deep emotion. He refused the sign. The next sign will be "the sign of the Son of Man in heaven" at the time of His glorious return. Then a believing remnant of His people will welcome Him.

3. The Warning against the leaven., Mark 8:14-21

He warns against the leaven of the Pharisees and Herodians. It is the only time the word leaven is found in Mark. It means, as elsewhere in the Word of God, evil. The leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy, insincerity of an unbelieving heart in opposition to God. The expression of it is self-righteousness in pride. The leaven of the Herodians is worldliness. He warns His disciples to beware of it for the leaven of the Pharisees was in them too. They did not fully see His Glory, though they believed in Him as the promised Messiah. Their state and the

Lord’s Power and patience towards them is beautifully brought out in the healing of the blind man.

4. The Healing of the blind man., Mark 8:22-26

This healing at Bethsaida is only recorded by Mark. It reveals the tender, patient and successful method of the Servant in His ministry. The disciples’ case is illustrated. They saw “men as if they were trees.” Their sight was imperfect. But He did not leave them in that condition. Their clear sight came, when the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, was given to them. But many other lessons are found here. See how He led the blind man outside and what pains He took, and though He knew all about the effect of putting His hands upon his eyes, yet He inquired lovingly “if he beheld anything.” If we are in His loving hands, separated from Bethsaida (“place of snares,” a picture of the world), He will deal with us in the same tenderness and patience. Mark 8:26 tells us once more how He did not seek honor from man.

5. Peter’s Confession., Mark 8:27-30

How perfectly all is linked together. Though the disciples were imperfect in their sight yet they knew that He was the Christ. That is true faith, which they all possessed, with the exception of Judas, who never addressed Him as Lord. Mark gives the briefest account of Peter’s confession. Matthew contains the completest record. The church, as a future thing, is announced in Matthew as well as the Kingdom. The church is not mentioned by Mark. All shows the divine hand which guided the pens of these instruments. What is dispensational is always fully given in the kingly, dispensational Gospel by Matthew and omitted by Mark.

6. The first announcement of His coming rejection and death., Mark 8:31-33

The Servant now speaks of Himself as the Son of Man, the title both of His rejection and of His exaltation. For the first time He announces His coming death. He knew all from the beginning. He knew it when He went into the dark waters of Jordan. He knew it all along in His ministry of toil. Yet with the vision of His rejection, of His suffering on the cross, constantly before Him, He continued uninterruptedly in His ministry of love. Nothing could swerve Him from it. What perfection and beauty! But He also spoke of His resurrection. He knew the glory that should follow. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross and despised the shame. In our service for God the Cross and the Glory should ever be seen. We, too, must be willing to share His reproach and look forward to the crowning day, the day of His Glory and ours as well. Peter

becomes, on account of his blindness, the mouthpiece of Satan, rebuking the Lord. Then “He looked on His disciples,” an addition in Mark. What a look it must have been! He rebuked Peter in the words He used when Satan made the same suggestion to avoid the cross.

7. His Disciples to follow in His path. The Coming Glory., Mark 8:34-38; Mark 9:1

Well may God’s people ponder over these words. Salvation is by Grace. Nothing can save but Grace. Eternal salvation is not dependent on our walk. But the way which leads to Glory is the way of self-denial and suffering. It is His own path. “Is it not true that we naturally like to escape trial, shame and rejection; that we shrink from the suffering which, doing God’s will, in such a world as this, must ever entail; that we prefer to have a quiet, respectable path in the earth--in short, the best of both worlds? How easily one may be ensnared into this!” (W. K.) We may not be called upon to lose the life for His sake, but “let him deny himself” we can always do, enabled by His Grace. All the words our ever blessed Lord spoke to His disciples hold good in this dispensation of Grace. He announces His coming Glory. It is His second Coming in the Glory of His Father.



Banias. Here are the five niches in the rock formation. Jesus stood here in Matthew 16:13 and said he would build his church on "this rock" and the Gates of Hades would not overcome it.



Archaeological light: Caesarea Philippi

Above picture: Banias

"Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?" And they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." (Mark 8:27-29).

The city of Caesarea Philippi was on the southwestern slope of Mount Hermon and the northernmost extent of Jesus' ministry. Here, about 25 miles north-east of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus could be alone with His disciples -- outside the domain of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, and within the area of Philip the Tetrarch. The population was not Jewish, so Jesus could teach the twelve in peace. Here, on a road outside of the city, Jesus asked one of the most profound questions that could ever be posed, "Who do men say that I am?" It is interesting to see where Jesus chose to ask this question, for there are few areas in all of the world with more religious associations than Caesarea Philippi.

Historic Background

Caesarea Philippi is one of the most pleasant sites in Israel -- it is on a terrace 1,150 feet high overlooking a fertile valley. It is also an area scattered with the temples of ancient Syrian Baal worship. Historians have listed at least fourteen such temples -- it was a place beneath the shadow of ancient gods.

There are several references to this area in the Old Testament. The northernmost conquest of Joshua is described as ranging from "the mountains of Israel and its lowlands, from Mount Halak and the ascent to Seir, even as far as Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon" (Joshua 11:17). In a description of the nations that were left to "test" Israel we read of "the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath" (Judges 3:3). In 1 Chronicles 5:23 we read that "the children of the half-tribe of Manasseh dwelt in the land. Their numbers increased from Bashan to Baal Hermon, that is, to Senir, or Mount Hermon."

A cave near Caesarea Philippi is said to be the birthplace of the Greek god Pan, the god of nature, fields, forests, mountains, flocks and shepherds. "He is son of Hermes by one or another nymph; his mother was so scared by his appearance that she abandoned him at birth and Hermes introduced him to Olympus. His name is probably related to the same root as Latin pasco, and thus means 'shepherd.'" (Richard Stoneman, Greek Mythology, p. 136). The cult of Pan originated in Arcadia, a pastoral region in Greece. Greek travelers, finding the landscape was like their homeland, established this area of worship to Pan. During the Hellenistic period, a sanctuary was built to Pan. There are five niches hewn out of rock to the right of the cave -- at one time they probably held statues -- three of the niches bear inscriptions in Greek mentioning Pan, Echo and Galerius (one of Pan's priests).

The original name for Caesarea Philippi was Panias (also spelt Paneas, Paneion and Paneias). The modern name is Banias -- an Arabic corruption of

Panias.

The Jordan river has four main sources, and the cave at Caesarea Philippi is its' easternmost source -- this alone would make the area full of emotion for the Jews. "This is a very fine cave in a mountain, under which there is a great cavity in the earth; and the cavern is abrupt, and prodigiously deep, and full of water. Over it hangs a vast mountain, and under the cavern arise the springs of the River Jordan." (The Works Of Flavius Josephus).

In Caesarea Philippi there was a great temple of white marble built to the godhead of Caesar -- it had been built by Herod the Great. "At Paneas Antiochius III defeated the Ptolemies of Egypt in 200 BCE, thus establishing Seleucid rule in Palestine and Syria In 20 BCE, Augustus gave Paneas to King Herod who erected there a temple of white marble to his patron (Josephus, Antiq. 15, 10.3/360); but the city was built only later by his son Herod Philip. During the First Jewish War (66-70 CE), Vespasian together with Titus and his army encamped there, and were entertained by King Agrippa II (Josephus, War, 3, 9.7/443-44). After the death of Agrippa II, Caesarea Philippi was attributed to the province of Syria, and later to Phoenicia." (Rousseau and Arav, Jesus And His World, p. 34).

In 2 B.C. Herod the Great's son, Philip, named it Caesarea in honor of Augustus, and, to differentiate it from Caesarea Maritima, it became known as Caesarea Philippi. Later, Herod Agrippa would call the place Neroneas in honor of the Emperor Nero. After the destruction of Jerusalem, "The victors gave no quarter, but slew all Jews upon whom they could lay their hands; 97,000 fugitives were caught and sold as slaves; many of them died as unwilling gladiators in the triumphal games that were celebrated at Berytus, Caesarea Philippi and Rome." (Will Durant, Caesar And Christ, p. 545).

Caesarea Philippi was probably destroyed by an earthquake in 363 A.D. Since 1967 there has been considerable excavation in and around the city -- the shrine of Pan has been cleared, along with the Herodian palace.

Chapter 9

9.The Servant’s coming glory

Verses 1-13. The transfiguration

Verses 14-29. The demon-possessed boy

Verses 30-41. The Servant again predicts His death

Verses 42-50. The Servant warns of hell

*1. The Glory to Come foreshadowed in the Transfiguration. (*Mark 9:1-13. Matthew 17:1-13*;* Luke 9:28-36.*)*

*2. The helpless disciples and the secret of failure. (*Mark 9:14-29. Matthew 17:14-20*;* Luke 9:37-42*)*

*3. The second announcement of His death. (*Mark 9:30-32. Matthew 17:22-23*;* Luke 9:43-45*)*

*4. The self-seeking disciples.(*Mark 9:33-37. Matthew 18:1-5*;* Luke 9:46-48*)*

*5. The Servant's gentleness and tolerance. (*Mark 9:38-41. Luke 9:49-50*)*

*6. The solemn warning. (*Mark 9:42-50. Matthew 18:6-9.*)*

1. The Glory to Come foreshadowed in the Transfiguration., Mark 9:1-13

The Lord had the transfiguration in mind when He spoke of some standing there and not tasting death. 2 Peter 1:16 gives the meaning of the transfiguration as a type and earnest of His Coming into His Kingdom. On that mountain the three disciples saw the Kingdom of God come with power. The Servant appears in Glory. The Saints are represented by Moses and Elias, those who have died and those changed in the twinkling of an eye. The three disciples represented the Saints on earth, when He comes into His Kingdom; the Shekinah cloud was there. And Peter blundered again when he lowered the dignity of the Lord by putting Him alongside of the two Old Testament Servants of God. The Father's voice is heard once more, vindicating the honor of His Son. What an encouragement the transfiguration must have been for the Servant-Son.

2. The helpless disciples; the secret of their failure. Mark 9:14-29

The whole scene is of greatest importance. The Conditions He finds returning from the mount of transfiguration are typical of the conditions on the earth when He comes again. Here are helpless disciples, triumphant, unbelieving scribes and the manifestation of Satan's power. All this we cannot follow in detail. Notice the additions in Mark's account. They had no power to cast out the demon, because they were "faithless." The Lord told them that lack of prayer and fasting were the causes of their failure. Dependence on God and denial of self are meant. How gracious was the complete deliverance of the afflicted boy. If God's

people knew more of real prayer and real denial of self, there would be a greater manifestation of His power through them.

3. The second announcement of His death., Mark 9:30-32

Passing again through Galilee He announced His death and resurrection the second time. They understood not and were afraid to ask Him. The cross was foreign to them. Other thoughts occupied their hearts.

4. The self-seeking disciples., Mark 9:33-37

And while He who had made of Himself no reputation, who came to be the Servant of all, was looking towards the goal of His earthly ministry, the cross and its shame, they disputed all the way who should be the greatest. Vain glory filled their hearts in expectation of the earthly kingdom for which they waited. They were unable to enter into His thoughts. They were silent because they realized that their dispute was wrong. Then He taught them. The desire of being first shows only fitness to be last. Such a desire reveals nothing but self. Humility must ever be a leading characteristic of the disciple. Then He illustrates it by the small child He took in His arms. Such in dependence, humbleness in mind and confidence, the disciples must be to enjoy His fellowship. With such He can identify Himself.

5. The Servant's gentleness., Mark 9:38-41

Another form of self appears among the disciples. John would have the Lord rebuke those who used His name effectually and belonged not to their company. It was a narrow sectarianism. Of all the manifestations of self the religious sectarian self, as expressed in exclusivism, rejecting those who do not fellowship with them--is by far the worst, and in the Epistles by the Spirit of God is designated as a work of the flesh. How very offensive it must have been to God's perfect Servant. Yet what a gentle answer He gives. How we all can learn from Him. The smallest service in doing honor to His name would not be forgotten of God.

6. The Solemn Warning., Mark 9:42-50

The words are for both saint and sinner. We quote from another on this solemn word. "Nevertheless, as regards themselves, all depends on the faithfulness of Christ; and on this account they need to free themselves from all the things which tend to separate from Christ, which led into sin, and bring on apostasy in the heart as well as outward apostasy. God will keep His own, but He will keep them in making them obedient to His Word. Besides this, God puts all to the

proof; the fire of His judgment is applied to all, both to saints and sinners. In the saints it consumes the dross, in order that the pure gold may shine in its true lustre; in the case of sinners it is the fire of eternal judgment that is not quenched.

"'Every sacrifice must be salted with salt' refers to Leviticus 2:13. The salt represents the power of the Holy Spirit to keep us from all that is impure and produce holiness in a heart devoted to God, to keep us from all corruption. 'Have salt in yourselves.' He wishes us to exercise diligence in order that our souls, in our walk, may be thus sanctified before God, and then manifest it before the world and that we should walk with others in peace." (J.N. Darby on "Mark.")

"The burden" where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched, "falls on the conscience stricken like the bell that tolls the felon to his doom. Would that it might kindle our hearts who believe into an unwonted earnestness on behalf of perishing souls!" Many attempts are made to deny the solemn warning in its fearful meaning, but they are eternal truth. The Son of God came from Heaven's Glory, walked on earth as the Servant and tasted death, yea, forsaken of God on the Cross, to save man from the unquenchable fire.

Christian Psychology: Demon Possession and Mental Illness

Does demon possession exist today? If so, should it be considered in the differential diagnosis of mental illness? Here follows some insights from a Christian perspective.

Christians have held many different views on how we should apply New Testament accounts of demon possession (or 'demonisation') to the construction of a contemporary understanding of spiritual and mental disease. Following the enlightenment, and particularly within more academic or scientific circles, it has been popular to 'demythologise' the Gospel stories of demon possession. Anthropologists, psychotherapists, psychologists and psychiatrists see beliefs about demonology as being culturally or socially determined explanations for problems which can otherwise be fully explained in sociological, psychodynamic, psychological or psychiatric terms. However, many Christians (particularly in some charismatic circles) still believe that demons really do exist as actual spiritual entities, and that they can adversely affect or invade the lives of men and women today.

It is not possible here to provide a full coverage of this subject. The interested reader is encouraged to read Roy Clements' brief but excellent Cambridge

Paper, 'Demons and the Mind', or else the book 'Demon Possession' by John Montgomery, which provides a multi-disciplinary, perspective on the subject. However, a particular aspect of this problem is of very practical relevance in medicine - and especially in psychiatry. Should we see demon possession (or 'demonisation') as being a differential diagnosis for certain kinds of mental disorder. or should we see it as being an alternative, perhaps redundant, explanation for such disorders? Alternatively, and this point has recently been argued particularly cogently by Roy Clements, should we see demonic influence as being a neglected aetiological factor within a multifactorial model for the aetiology of mental disorder?

Demythologisation

Before giving consideration to the Gospel accounts of demonisation, it is interesting to reflect briefly on some of the general issues concerned here. For example, how did Jesus respond to the erroneous scientific views of His time? We have no account of Jesus ever trying to correct prevailing beliefs that the earth was flat. He does not seem to have engaged with Luke in a dialogue about the aetiology of any of the illnesses that He healed. Of course, His mission was not to interfere with the scientific accumulation of human knowledge about the world and the universe, but to win back those who were spiritually lost because of sin. We presume, therefore, that He shared our human limitations in terms of His understanding of other matters. To 'go along with' prevailing errors of a medical or scientific kind was not dishonesty, but rather a sharing of our human limitations.

When we consider Jesus' understanding of demons, however, it is really not satisfactory to suggest that He was limited by a lack of scientific knowledge. Demons, if they exist, are spiritual beings and Jesus came to bring spiritual truth. Surely, He would not accede to erroneous views regarding the influence of evil in human lives? Furthermore. the Gospels provide evidence that Jesus actually saw the casting out of demons as a part of His mission on earth (eg Lk 13: 32), and that He made it a part of the mission of His disciples (eg Lk 9: 1). We must, therefore, be very hesitant to accept any idea that Jesus was simply acceding to, or actively colluding with, a primitive misconstruction of the nature of mental illness. In any case, elsewhere, the Bible suggests that Hebrew culture did indeed have an understanding of mental illness as being separate and different from demonic activity or human evil (eg 1 Sa 21: 13).

If mental illness and demonisation are not simply different names for, or different models of understanding of. the same thing, then we are left then with two possibilities. Either they are unrelated phenomena, or else there is some

kind of association between them. Of course, even if they are unrelated, they may stilt be confused with each other because of superficial similarities. If they are related, however, we need to understand the nature of the connection between them. Thus, we may be faced with a differential diagnostic problem. Either we need to distinguish which of these two entities we are dealing with, or else we need to identify which is the primary problem which led to the other as a secondary 'complication' . Alternatively, perhaps we may need to identify a third, independent, variable which gives rise to both demonisation and mental illness.

Demon possession: Biblical and contemporary presentations

In order to answer some of these questions, we need to turn to the New Testament accounts of demonisation. Jesus clearly cast evil spirits out of many people who He met (Mt 4:24, 8:16; Mk 1:32, 4:41). However, we are told about 6 cases in some detail:

- *The demon possessed Gerasene(s): Mt 8:28-34; Mk 5:2-20; Lk 8: 26-39*
- *A demon possessed mute man: Mt 9:32-34; Lk 11:14-26*
- *A demon possessed blind and mute man: Mt 12:22-28*
- *The Canaanite or Syro-Phoenecian woman's daughter: Mt 15:22-28; Mk 7:25-30*
- *An epileptic boy: Mt 17:15 -21; Mk 9:14-2 9; Lk 9:3 8-43*
- *The man in the synagogue at Capernaum: Mk 1:21-28; Lk 4:33-36*

From these accounts. we may see that there is a diversity in the presentation of demon possession. The demon possessed Gerasene showed enormous strength, cried out loudly, engaged in deliberate self-harm, and immediately recognised Jesus as the Son of God. Others were mute, or blind and mute, or epileptic. We must, therefore, be wary of imagining that there are invariable and characteristic signs or symptoms of demonisation. We must also, apparently, look out for demonic influence in the neurology clinic as well as in the psychiatric clinic. Clearly, differential diagnosis along traditional medical lines is going to be a very difficult if not futile exercise, even if we accept the Biblical accounts as providing a comprehensive picture of the different possible presentations. In fact, it would appear more reasonable to argue that the Biblical presentations are so diverse that they probably represent just a small proportion of the full spectrum of possibilities. It would seem, therefore, that the exercise of a spiritual gift (1 Cor 12: 10) would be likely to be more useful than the application of medical knowledge when a person is demon possessed, although a knowledge of psychiatric illness is undoubtedly of value in continuing the diagnosis of a psychiatric illness when one is present.

The relationship between demonisation and mental illness

Why, then, is psychiatry particularly thought of as being the area of medicine in which demon possession is most likely to be encountered? It is true that behavioural disturbance, and deliberate self harm, such as that presented by the Gerasene, might also accompany psychiatric disorder. In fact, the range of possible differential diagnoses in this case is probably quite wide. In the other Biblical cases, loss of sight or hearing, and epilepsy, could all have an hysterical basis rather than being due to a neurological diagnosis. Roy Clements has also suggested that the voices reported as those of demons might be the alter-egos of multiple personality disorder. (It is worth noting, though, that this is a contentious diagnosis, which is rarely made in the UK at the present time). However, there are no scriptural accounts of demonisation which sound particularly like schizophrenia as we see it today. Furthermore, there is every reason to believe that most prevalent psychiatric disorders may have more to do with environmental stress, psychological or biological vulnerability, and social deprivation rather than the influence of evil spirits.

In the lay mind, some accounts of demonisation (notably the Gerasene) do present a very convincing example of 'madness' . However, I believe that there is a danger that we look for demonisation amongst those who are psychiatrically ill for a variety of reasons which do not have a basis in their similarity with the description of demon possession as found in the Gospels. Psychiatric patients, especially those who are psychotic, behave, speak and think in ways that we find difficult to understand. We therefore struggle to find an explanation for their experiences, and if science does not have convincing answers, then we look elsewhere. Not only this, but we find the behaviour, speech and thought of these patients frightening, both because of what they might do to us or others, and because of the recognition that 'there but for the grace of God go I' .

As Christians in psychiatry, then, we have an important responsibility. We need to be informed of the findings and limits of psychiatric research, so that we can offer rational scientific explanations and treatments for psychiatric illness, where these exist. We need to bring healing to, and show love and care for, patients with stigmarising mental illnesses, just as Jesus showed compassion for those who were stigmatised by physical illness (eg Mt 8:1-4). However, we also need to recognise that not all human problems will be explicable by medical science. The New Testament tells us that Jesus has commissioned us to ' drive out demons' (Mk 16:17), and we must be ready to respond to this

commission if and when we are called to do so.

Psychiatry, then, is not the only domain within which we need to be aware of demonic influence, and perhaps it is not even the most important such domain. Furthermore, we cannot expect to make a simple differential diagnosis according to certain signs or symptoms of demonisation. However, this does not exclude the need to consider other possible links between demonic activity and mental illness.

We recognise that psychiatric illnesses, and also a wide range of so-called 'somatic' disorders, are of a multifactorial aetiology involving psychological and social, as well as physical components. Why, then, should not spiritual factors also play a part? For example, if people can become depressed because they are bereaved, or because of physical illness, why should they not also become depressed because of demonic interference in their lives? Thus, we must keep in mind a truly holistic view of the human condition, which involves spiritual, as well as psychological, social and physical dimensions.

Psychiatrists are particularly familiar with assessing the physical and social, as well as the psychological, aspects of their patients lives. Like other doctors, they need to ensure that they do not neglect the spiritual dimension of life. However, I am not convinced that psychiatric clinics are particularly full of unrecognised demonic influence. Neither is the recognition of demonisation a question of medical differential diagnosis, although a psychiatric assessment may sometimes assist the non-medical minister to avoid attributing a primary psychological disturbance to demonic activity. Rather, I believe, that we may encounter demonic activity in all walks of life, just as Jesus did. If, and when, we have such an encounter, we can be confident in His authority over such matters - an authority which He has delegated to us.

Demon possession and mental illness: Conclusions

Demon possession and mental illness, then, are not simply alternative diagnoses to be offered when a person presents with deliberate self harm or violent behaviour, although they may need to be distinguished in such circumstances, whether by spiritual discernment or the application of basic psychiatric knowledge. It would seem reasonable to argue that demon possession may be an actiological factor in some cases of mental illness, but it may also be an actiological factor in some non-psychiatric conditions, and in other cases it may be encountered in the absence of psychiatric or medical disorder. Furthermore, demon possession is essentially a spiritual problem, but mental illness is a multifactorial affair, in which spiritual, social, psychological

and physical factors may all play an actiological role. The relationship between these concepts is therefore complex. Differential diagnostic skills may have a part to play in offering help to those whose problems could be of demonic or medical/psychiatric origin. However, spiritual discernment is of at least equal, if not greater, importance in such matters.



Sea of Galilee

Chapter 10

10.The Servant's Perean ministry

Verses 1-16. Question of divorce

Verses 17-31. The rich young man

Verses 32*34. The Servant again foretells His death

Verses 35-45. James' and John's selfish ambition

Verses 46-52. Bartimaeus receives his sight

Verses 1-52

In Judea

*1. The question concerning Divorce. (*Mark 10:1-12. Matthew 19:1-9.

*2. Children are blessed by Him. (*Mark 10:13-16. Matthew 19:13-15*;* Luke 18:15-17.

*3. The rich young Ruler and Warning against Riches. (*Mark 10:17-27. Matthew 19:16-26*;* Luke 18:18-27.

*4. Concerning Rewards. (*Mark 10:28-31. Matthew 19:27-30*;* Luke 18:28-30.

*5. On to Jerusalem. The third announcement of His death and Resurrection. (*Mark 10:32-34. Matthew 20:17-19*;* Luke 18:31-34.

*6. The Desire of James and John. (*Mark 10:35-45. Matthew 20:20-28*;* Luke 22:24-27.

*7. At Jericho. The Healing of Bartimaeus. (*Mark 10:46-52. Matthew 20:29-34*;* Luke 18:35-43.

1. The Question concerning Divorce., Mark 10:1-12

The Lord restores in teaching the original meaning of marriage and speaks against divorce Moses had permitted on account of the hardness of their hearts. Thus He restored the original institution of marriage. His ministry is now almost ended and He is on His way to Jerusalem to go to the cross.

2. Children are blest by Him., Mark 10:13-16

Again the disciples failed. They showed a kind of self-importance and dignity in rebuking those who brought the little children. He was indignant. They had no right whatever to rebuke and to shut out from His presence. They usurped His place and by their domineering attitude misrepresented Him. And priestcraft has brought this to perfection. But oh! the contrast. He received them and tenderly took them into His arms to bless them. Such is the Kingdom of God. Sin is in them. But the little children present some characteristics of uncorrupted nature. The way into the Kingdom is the new birth; and that must be received as a little child.

3. The rich young ruler and warnings against Riches. Mark 10:17-27

Here is one, who would inherit eternal life by doing. He "kneeled" (mentioned only by Mark) and showed reverence, and yet he called Him only "Good Master." He was a moral Young man but unsaved. The reply of the Lord is significant, He refuses the address "Good Master." The young man did not believe on Him as Son of God. The logic is perfect. If He is not God, He could not be good, and if He is good, then He is God. Yet "Jesus, beholding him, loved him;" a statement found only in Mark. He did not see the truth that man is not good, but a sinner, and salvation cannot be by works but is by Grace. Note the beautiful answer the Lord gave to His disciples. "Who then can be saved?" And Jesus looking upon them saith, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." Man cannot be saved by what he is or does. Blessed truth. But God has accomplished salvation by the gift of His Son and this salvation is received by faith in Him.

4. Concerning Rewards., Mark 10:28-31

It was a selfish question, which Peter asked. Somehow he would remind the Lord that while the young man refused to part with his riches, they had left all. And the meek and lowly One answers graciously and gives the promise of reward in this life and in the age to come. But it is reward only if it is done for His sake and the Gospel's. It is a blessed thing to leave the rewards with Him.

5. On to Jerusalem. Third announcement of His death and Resurrection., Mark 10:32-34

But were they willing to leave all for His sake? As the Servant now at the close of His ministry went up to Jerusalem they were amazed at His calmness and determination to go to the place, where death awaited Him, according to His own predictions. They were afraid of their own lives as they followed Him. The Servant went before them in the lead; the frightened group came behind. The third prediction of His death is the completest.

6. The Desire of James and John., Mark 10:35-45

Their fear was short-lived. They did not grasp the solemn announcement that the Son of Man would have to die and did not understand that all the promised blessings could only be realized through His death on the cross. They had faith in a coming Kingdom of Glory, faith in the Servant so lowly to be the King and that they were to reign with Him. The request is stated and answered graciously by the Lord. And the two who were afraid when He turned towards Jerusalem now say that they are able to drink the cup with Him and be baptized with the

baptism, which awaited Him, the inward and outward sufferings of the cross. But these two forsook Him a few days later and fled. The others were much displeased, no doubt for selfish reasons, and then still other words of instruction came from His lips.

7. At Jericho. The Healing of Bartimaeus., Mark 10:46-52

This healing stands at the beginning of the end of that blessed life lived on the earth. Up to Mark 10:45 He speaks of Himself as “Son of Man. “ The phrase “Son of David” appears only once in Mark’s Gospel. Bartimaeus calls upon Him by that name and is healed. It is the prelude to the great events in Jerusalem, His presentation as King, rejection, suffering and death. The miracle of Jericho holds the same place in the three Gospels. Israel ‘s condition is easily seen in Bartimaeus’ blindness. The Son of David had come to give sight to the blind and in Jericho (the place of curse) He shows His gracious Power. Bartimaeus followed Him as the blessed witness of His power.



The huge tell, site of ancient Jericho. Important excavations have been undertaken at Jericho

PART III. THE SERVANT IN JERUSALEM PRESENTED AS KING AND REJECTED -- Chapters 11-13

Chapter 11

11.The Servant's entry into Jerusalem

Verses 1-11. His presentation as King

Verses 12-14. The barren fig tree

Verses 15-21. The cleansing of the temple

Verses 22-23. Faith contrasted with wicked unbelief

Verses 1-33

*1. The Servant enters into Jerusalem. (*Mark 11:1-11. Matthew 21:1-11*;* Luke 19:28-40*;* John 12:12-16*)*

*2. The fig tree cursed. (*Mark 11:12-14. *Compare with* Matthew 21:19-21*)*

*3. The Cleansing of the Temple. (*Mark 11:15-18. Matthew 21:12-19*;* Luke 19:45-48*)*

*4. The Withered Fig tree. (*Mark 11:19-26. Matthew 21:20-22*)*

*5. Again in the City. His Authority Questioned. (*Mark 11:27-33. Matthew 21:23-27*;* Luke 20:1-8.*)*

1. The Servant enters Jerusalem., Mark 11:1-11

He presents Himself as the promised Son of David to the nation as written in the prophecy of Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9). As King the multitudes welcome Him. Hosanna (save now); Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord. "Blessed be the Kingdom of our Father David, that cometh in the Name of the Lord: Hosanna in the Highest." They expected the promised Kingdom and they welcomed Him as Son of David with power to save. But He knew what it all meant. He is silent, according to Mark, but enters into the temple and looked around upon all things without uttering a word. There is nothing for Him there. He then left the city and returned to Bethany (meaning: house of affliction).

When He comes the second time with Glory, He will be greeted by a remnant of His people and set up the Kingdom of David.

2. The Fig Tree Cursed., Mark 11:12-14

He was hungry. In all the enthusiasm no one had thought of His need. The rejection of the Servant-Son is evident in this. The fig tree is the emblem of the Jewish nation. He came looking for fruit and found none. “The fig tree was punished not for being without fruit, but for proclaiming by the voice of those leaves that it had fruit; not for being barren, but for being false; and this was the guilt of Israel, so much deeper than the guilt of the nations” (Trench).

3. The Cleansing of the Temple., Mark 11:15-19

Twice He cleansed the temple, in the beginning of His ministry (John 2:13-16) and at the close. Most likely the desecration of the house was worse at the end than in the beginning. The greed for money is the prominent feature in the defilement of the temple. The actions of the Lord brings out the Satanic hatred of the scribes and chief priests. He was hated as the Servant without a cause and hated unto death. Again He went out of the city.

4. The Withered Fig Tree and Instructions., Mark 11:20-26

The dried up fig tree is made the occasion to teach the disciples the power of faith in God. The fig tree typifies the religious condition of the people. The mountain, the nation as such, thinking themselves firmly established. But soon that mountain was to be removed and cast into the sea (the sea of nations). Faith was exercised by the Servant and He calls upon His own to have faith in God. Faith can remove every obstacle. For the disciples it meant the obstacle of that mountain, the nation. Mark 11:24 is precious and has the same meaning today as it had when the words were spoken. God ever answers faith. But that faith must be paired with forgiveness.

5. Again in Jerusalem. The Authority of the Servant Questioned and His Answer. Mark 11:27-33

Visiting the temple again He met His enemies, who questioned Him concerning His authority. His authority was completely established by the mighty works He had done. The omniscient One knew their hatred and asked them a question, which they did not dare to answer. He, the perfect Servant had zeal for God and for His house; they, the religious leaders, had only zeal for their own authority, This is still the mark of all ritualism.



The Golden Gate, Jerusalem

Chapter 12

11.The Servant's teaching in Jerusalem

Verses 1-12. Parable giving a resumé of Israel's spiritual history

Verses 13-17. Questions of the tribute

Verses 18-27. The Servant silences the Sadducees

Verses 28-34. The great commandment

Verses 35-40. The Servant questions the Pharisees

Verses 41-44. The widow's offering

*1. The Parable of the Vineyard. (*Mark 12:1-12. Matthew 21:33-46*;* Luke 20:9-19*)*

*2. The Question concerning the Tribute Money. (*Mark 12:13-17. Matthew 22:15-22*;* Luke 20:20-26*)*

*3. The Sadducees Questioning concerning Resurrection. (*Mark 12:18-27. Matthew 22:23-33*;* Luke 20:27-38*)*

*4. The Question of the Scribe. (*Mark 12:28-34. Matthew 22:34-40*)*

*5. His Question. (*Mark 12:35-37. Matthew 22:41-46*;* Luke 20:41-44*)*

*6. Beware of the Scribes. (*Mark 12:38-40. Matthew 23:1-39*;* Luke 20:45-47*)*

*7. The Servant's loving sympathy and praise. (*Mark 12:41-44. Luke 21:1-4.*)*

1. The Parable of the Vineyard. (Mark 12:1-12

The parable is a review of the history of Israel and its culmination in the rejection of the Son. With what calmness the perfect One relates it all. He is ready to have all done unto Him of which He speaks. A comparison with the Gospel of Matthew will show that Mark is brief and passes on rapidly, omitting utterances of the Lord which are not needed in his description of the Servant.

2. The Question concerning the Tribute Money., Mark 12:13-17

With this paragraph we have the different classes of Jews approaching the Lord to tempt Him. Pharisees and Herodians, Sadducees and a Scribe. The Lord manifests His wisdom and they are defeated. Then He turns questioner and warns against the scribes. His authority they could no longer question and now they tried to catch Him in His words. Pharisees and Herodians, so opposed to each other, could make a common cause in hating God's Servant. If He had answered "yes" the Pharisees would have condemned Him for favoring the Gentile yoke. If He had said "no," the Herodians would have accused Him as an enemy of Caesar. How wonderful His answer! They even had to marvel and yet it only intensified their hate. Caesar's image told out the story of their sin.

3. The Sadducees Questioning concerning Resurrection., Mark 12:18-27

The Sadducees were rationalists and denied the existence of angels and the resurrection. They only believed in the giving of the law and accepted the

Pentateuch. It was a fine spun argument. The Lord silences them from the portion of the Scriptures they endorsed.

4. The Question of the Scribe., Mark 12:28-34

A scribe now makes the last attempt. But he was indeed “not far from the Kingdom of God.” The one step was the acceptance of Christ, whose wisdom he had owned.

5. His Question., Mark 12:35-37

Then the Lord turned questioner. His wisdom had closed their mouths. In Matthew’s Gospel this significant question is more fully given. He refers to Psalms 110:1-7. In connection with Matthew four great facts are stated by the Lord. 1) This Psalm was written by David. 2) It was written by inspiration. 3) It is a Messianic Psalms 4:1-8) Christ is David’s Lord and David’s Son. While it silenced the scribes it also silences the present day Sadducees, the higher critics with their inventions. They claim that Psalms 110:1-7 was not written by David and Christ is not foretold in it.

6. Beware of the Scribes., Mark 12:38-40

In Matthew the Holy Spirit reports the full discourse against the scribes and Pharisees (chapter 23) ending with the solemn statement, “Behold your house is left unto you desolate.” In Mark, where the divine design is to give us the picture of the Servant, only a few sentences are given. Yet they contain the chief characteristics of the corrupt leaders of the nation. Love of being seen, love of applause, love of preeminence, assumed religiousness and the devouring of the poor are all mentioned. These hireling servants shall have greater damnation.

7. The Servant’s loving sympathy and praise., Mark 12:41-44

He had rendered such perfect service free from seeking applause or preeminence and now He shows His loving sympathy to one of the poor widows who were being spoiled by the greed of the Pharisees. That poor, yet rich, widow had two mites. It was her all and she gave it. She might have given one mite and retained the other. She cast in all she had. And He saw it and His sympathy was towards her for she reminded Him of His own service in giving all. How it must have refreshed His heart. May we remember that nothing escapes His eye.



At the Second Coming of the Son of Man

Chapter 13

13.The Servant's Olivet discourse

Verses 1-4. Prediction concerning the temple

Verses 5-23. Events of the tribulation

Verses 24-26. Second coming of the Son of Man

Verse 27. Regathering of Israel

Verses 28-33. The certainty of Christ's coming

Verses 34-37. Exhortations to watchfulness

*1. The Destruction of the Temple Predicted. (*Mark 13:1-2. Matthew 24:1-2*;* Luke 21:5-6*)*

*2. The Questions of the Disciples. (*Mark 13:3-4. Matthew 24:3*;* Luke 21:7*)*

*3. The Olivet Discourse. (*Mark 13:5-37. Matthew 24:4-42*;* Luke 21:8-38*)*

1. The Destruction of the Temple Predicted., Mark 13:1-2

He went out of the temple for the last time, when one of His disciples called attention to the temple buildings. They were of the most massive construction, some of them still in process of erection. He predicted complete destruction, which was fulfilled later in the year 70. The destruction of Jerusalem is more fully foretold in Luke 21:20-24.

2. The Questions of the Disciples., Mark 13:3-4

Mark gives us their names, which are omitted by Matthew and Luke. What follows is the answer.

3. The Olivet Discourse., Mark 13:5-37

Mark’s report is the briefest, Matthew’s the longest. omitted in Mark are the parables, which have special reference to the Christian profession (Matthew 25:1-46) and the judgment of living nations (Matthew 25:31-46). These belong in Matthew, but would be out of keeping with the purpose of the Gospel of Mark. The Service of our Lord, as we have seen, is in the foreground. The three characteristic discourses in Matthew nowhere else reported in full are: 1. The Sermon on the mount, which is the Proclamation of the King. 2. The Parable Discourse in Matthew 13:1-58, the mysteries of the Kingdom. 3. The Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24:1-51; Matthew 25:1-46, the future of the Kingdom. But why should there be anything at all in the Gospel of Mark about the future things, such as the end of the age and His Return in Glory, if only the Servant is described? it will be seen that the predictions are in part at least in view of their service. He forewarned them as His servants of what was to come after His departure.

It is not the purpose of this annotated analysis to give an exposition of this discourse. We must ask the reader to turn to our commentary on Matthew. We give here a subdivision of the discourse as contained in Mark 1:1-45) The characteristics of the present age and the end of the age. Mark 13:5-13. (2 The abomination of desolation or the great tribulation which precedes the Second Coming of Christ. Mark 13:14-23. 3) The visible manifestation of Christ. He will come again in clouds as Son of Man not as an humble Servant but as the King of Glory. The regathering of the elect Israel then takes place. Mark 13:24-27. 4) The Signs of His Coming. The budding fig tree is Israel awakening to new national life. Mark 13:28-33. Note that in Mark 13:32 “neither the Son” is added. This statement of our Lord that even He the Son does not know the hour

of His return has been used to deny His Deity. All kinds of theories have been invented to explain it. It is explained by the Lord having taken the place of humiliation as a Servant for “the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth.” This is why the statement appears only in Mark. It does not affect the truth of His Person. 5) The solemn exhortation to watch. It behooves the servants to watch during the absence of the Lord.



Gethsemane

Time of the Second Coming

Perhaps no event in the history of the world has been more anticipated than the Second Coming. Every generation of believers, including believers in the New Testament, has strongly believed that Jesus would return in their lifetime. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 tells us, "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come." Some are mistakenly frightened that they have missed the Second Coming. Others doubt that it will ever occur, "They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised?

Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4). So, we must avoid both extremes: (1) believing that the Second Coming has already occurred, and (2) believing that the Second Coming will never occur.

Many Bible teachers have made guesses as to when the Rapture and Second Coming will occur. They have all been incorrect. The Bible declares, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). The Bible describes several events which must occur before the Second Coming (Matthew 24:4-29; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Revelation chapters 6-18). So, we are to anticipate the Second Coming, but have a biblical understanding of it. We are not to set dates and times, but live our lives as if it could happen any day, any moment. Matthew 25:19-21, "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them…His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

PART IV. GIVING HIS LIFE A RANSOM FOR -- Chapters 14-15.

Chapter 14

14.Events leading to the Servant's death

Verses 1-2. The plot

Verses 3-9. The Servant anointed for death

Verses 10-11. Judas' plans to betray Jesus

Verses 12-25. The last Passover and the Lord's Supper

Verses 26-31. Peter's denial predicted

Verses 32-42. Gethsemane's agony

Verses 43-52. Judas' betrayal abd arrest of Jesus

Verses 53-65. Jesus before the Sanhedrin

Verses 66-72. Peter's denial



The Mount of Olives from the temple area in the snow

Garden across the Kidron Valley on the Mount of Olives (Hebrew Har ha-Zetim), a mile-long ridge paralleling the eastern part of Jerusalem, where Jesus is said to have prayed on the night of his arrest before his Crucifixion. The name Gethsemane (Hebrew gat shemanim, "oil press") suggests that the garden was a grove of olive trees in which was located an oil press.

Though the exact location of Gethsemane cannot be determined with certainty, Armenian, Greek, Latin, and Russian churches have accepted an olive grove on the western slope of the Mount of Olives as the authentic site, which was so regarded by the empress Helena, mother of Constantine (the first Christian emperor, early 4th century AD). An ancient tradition also locates the scene of the Gethsemane prayer and betrayal of Jesus at a place now called the Grotto of the Agony, near a bridge that crosses the Kidron Valley. At another possible location, south of this site in a garden containing old olive trees, is a Latin church erected by Franciscan monks on the ruins of a 4th-century church.

*1. Seeking by Craft to put Him to Death. (*Mark 14:1-2. Matthew 26:2-5*;* Luke 22:1-2.*)*

*2. The Anointing. (*Mark 14:3-9. Matthew 26:6-13*;* John 12:1-8*)*

*3. Judas offers to betray Him. (*Mark 14:10-11. Matthew 26:14-16*;* Luke 22:3-6*)*

*4. The last Paschal feast. (*Mark 14:12-21. Matthew 26:17-24*;* Luke 22:7-18*;* Luke 22:21-23*)*

*5. The Lord's Supper instituted. (*Mark 14:22-25. Matthew 26:26-29*;* Luke 22:17-20*)*

*6. Peter's denial predicted. (*Mark 14:26-31. Matthew 26:31-35*;* Luke 22:31-34*;* John 13:36-38*)*

*7. The Suffering in the Garden. (*Mark 14:32-42. Matthew 26:36-46*;* Luke 22:39-46*)*

*8. The Betrayal and Arrest of the Lord Jesus. (*Mark 14:43-52. Matthew 26:47-56*;* Luke 22:47-53*)*

*9. Before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin. (*Mark 14:53-65. Matthew 26:47-68*;* Luke 22:47-55*;* John 18:2-24.*)*

*10. Peter's denial. (*Mark 14:66-72. Matthew 26:69-75*;* Luke 22:56-62*;* John 18:17*;* John 18:25-27.*)*

1. Seeking by Craft to put Him to Death., Mark 14:1-2

His enemies were plotting, but over all was God and His eternal counsels. They were now ready "to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28). The Servant is to die as the true passover lamb and He who had ministered in such a perfect way is to give His life a ransom for many. They had resolved it should not be on the feast day. But God's will demanded that it should be on that day; and so it was.

2. The Anointing., Mark 14:3-9

The woman is not mentioned by Mark. It was Mary of Bethany, who sat at His feet when He had come to her house and who wept at His feet when Lazarus had died. She alone had grasped the meaning of the Lord's announcement concerning His death and resurrection. She did not go to the grave as others did.

She anointed His body for the burial. What love there was in her heart! How it must have delighted His heart when she did this act of faith and love.

3. Judas offers to betray Him., Mark 14:10-11

The anointing hastened Judas to betray Him (see John 12:5-6).

4. The last Paschal feast., Mark 14:12-21

First there was the preparation (Mark 14:12-16) and then the feast itself (Mark 14:17-21). What calmness and dignity is seen in all He does! He knew all what awaited Him. During the feast He announced the coming betrayal. Awful are the words coming from such lips, “Good were it for that man if he had never been born.” The same is true of every human being who rejects the Lord Jesus Christ and dies in sin.

5. The Lord’s Supper instituted., Mark 14:22-25

It is His own supper, the blessed memorial feast. “Do this in remembrance of Me.” They did not know then what it meant. But when the Holy Spirit had come they broke the bread. The Passover was the memorial of the deliverance of the people out of Egypt and reminded them of the blood that was sprinkled. A better blood was soon to be shed and a greater deliverance wrought by the Lamb of God. A blessed privilege to carry out His request (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

6. Peter’s denial predicted., Mark 14:26-31

The hymn they sang was composed of Psalms 115:1-18; Psalms 116:1-19; Psalms 117:1-2; Psalms 118:1-29. With what emotion of soul He must have sung with His disciples. The shadow of deepest agony and death was upon Him and yet the fullest praise flowed from His lips. He announced the scattering of the sheep and His own smiting by the hand of God. What must it have meant for Him, when He said with His perfect knowledge, “I will smite the shepherd.” That smiting, which took place on the cross, is the heart and mystery of the atonement. Peter’s denial is then predicted.

7. The Suffering in the Garden., Mark 14:32-42

In Gethsemane we are face to face with the most solemn event in the life of the Servant-Son, save that hour, when He hung on the cross, forsaken of God. What was His suffering there? No saint can ever fathom its depths. He did not shrink from death, nor was the agony on account of the physical sufferings He knew were to be His lot; nor was Satan, as some foolishly teach, ready to slay Him.

All such statements are dishonouring to Him. He was not in danger of death in Gethsemane. What was the cup He dreaded? The Sinless One, who knew no sin, was now soon to be made sin for us. God's face upon which He had ever looked was soon to be hid. And what was it when at last He was made sin for us on the cross? One sentence gives us the answer, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

8. The Betrayal and Arrest of the Lord Jesus., Mark 14:43-52

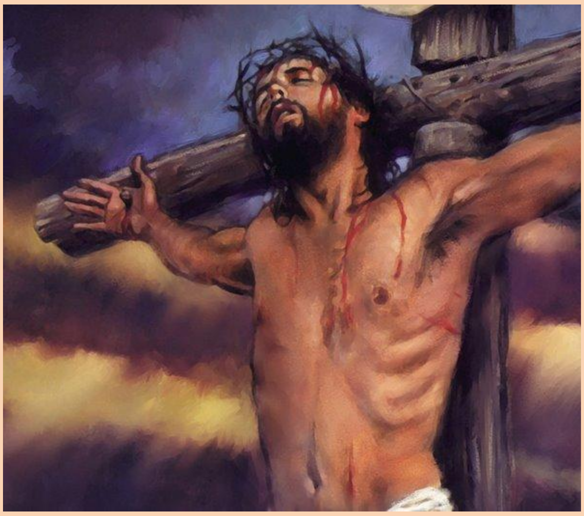
He surrenders Himself as the willing victim. Peter was ready to fight and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Mark omits the healing for he is to picture the Servant in His suffering and all relating to power is now out of place. In John's Gospel the Lord said one word, "I am," and those who came to arrest Him fell backward to the ground. John was guided by the Spirit of God to make a record of it. It could have no place in Mark's Gospel. They all forsook Him and fled. But only Mark tells of a certain young man, who followed and then fled naked. The young man may have been Mark himself.

9. Before the high priest and the Sanhedrin., Mark 14:53-65

We behold the Servant now delivered into the hands of man and behind man stood Satan. Man's wickedness and Satan's power are there, and in the midst, in solitary grandeur, stands the perfect Servant-Son. Mark tells us exclusively that the witnesses brought against Him did not agree. The Holy Spirit continues to hold Him up as the perfect Servant, in whose character and service not a flaw could be detected. But He witnesses the good confession and upon that blessed Word of Truth as it came from His lips He is condemned. Then they condemned Him to death and man's vile hatred energized by Satan cast itself upon the blessed One.

10. Peter's denial, Mark 14:66-72

The Lord had given the true testimony and Peter followed with his shameful denial. Mark gives what the other two evangelists omit, the cock crowing twice. The lessons from Peter's fall are simple. He had to pass through this terrible experience to become broken down and learn to know his own weakness. And how we all need to know that we are in ourselves good for nothing; "in my flesh there dwelleth no good thing."



Order of the Events of the Crucifixion

1. **Arrival at Golgotha (Calvary),** Mt 27:33; Mk 15:22; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:17

2. **Offer of a benumbing drink,** Mt 27:34

3. **The crucifixion**, Mt 27:35

4. **Cry, 'Father, forgive...'**, Lk 23:34

5. **The parting of Christ's garments,** Mt 27:35

6. **Jesus mocked,** Mt 27:39-44; Mk 15:29

7. **The thieves rail on Him, but one believes,** Mt 27:44

8. **Second cry, "Today you will be with me...',** Lk 23:43

9. **Third cry, 'Dear woman, here is your son,'** Jn 19:26-27

10. **The darkness,** Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33

11. **The fourth cry, 'My God, my God...',** Mt 27:46-47; Mk 15:34-36

12. **Fifth cry, 'I am thirsty,'** Jn 19:28

13. **Sixth cry, 'It is finished**,' Jn 19:30

14. **Seventh cry, 'Father, into thy hands...,'** Lk 23:46

15. **Jesus dismisses His spirit**, Mt 27:50; Mk 15:37

Chapter 15

15.The Servant's death and burial

Verses 1-15. Jesus before Pilate

Verses 16-23. The king of the Jews mocked

Verses 24-41. The crucifixion

Verses 42-47. The burial

*1. Before Pilate. (*Mark 15:1-5. Matthew 27:1-14*;* Luke 23:1-4*;* John 18:28-38.*)*

*2. Barabbas released and the Servant condemned. (*Mark 15:6-15. Matthew 27:15-26*;* Luke 23:16-25*;* John 18:39-40*)*

*3. Crowned with thorns and mocked. (*Mark 15:16-21. Matthew 27:27-32*;* Luke 23:26-43*;* John 19:1-16*)*

*4. Crucified. (*Mark 15:22-32. Matthew 27:33-44*;* Luke 23:26-43*;* John 19:17-27*)*

*5. Obedient unto death, the death of the Cross. (*Mark 15:33-41. Matthew 27:45-56*;* Luke 23:44-49*;* John 19:28-37*)*

*6. The Burial. (*Mark 15:42-47. Matthew 27:57-61*;* Luke 23:50-56*;* John 19:38-42.*)*

1. Before Pilate., Mark 15:1-5

The council had condemned Him to death and now the whole council delivered Him into the hands of the Gentiles. First the religious power had condemned the blessed Servant and the civil Power had to do the same. It will be seen that Mark's account of our Lord's trial before Pilate is the briefest, while Matthew's is the longest. Again the Servant witnesses a good confession. But when accused by the chief priests His blessed lips were sealed. He stood there to witness and not to defend Himself. What a gracious example He gives to all His servants. The hatred of the religious leaders of the people is especially emphasized by Mark. For the complete exposition of this trial before Pilate see "Exposition of Matthew."

2. Barabbas released; the Servant condemned to be crucified. Mark 15:6-15

The Story of Barabbas and his release is full of helpful instruction. "So true it was that, even in this last scene, Jesus delivers others at His own cost and in every sense. He had just before delivered the disciples from being taken; He is now the means of delivering Barabbas, wicked as he was. He never saved Himself. It was the very perfection of the moral Glory of Christ to deliver, bless, save, and in all at the expense of Himself." ("Gospel of Mark," W. Kelly) Barabbas was released, though guilty and condemned, because the Lord Jesus took his Place. Christ was his substitute. Barabbas released might have gone out and looked up to Him, who hung on the cross and said, "He died for me; he paid my penalty." It is a blessed illustration of the atonement. They ask for the murderer Barabbas and demand the horrible death by crucifixion for God's

perfect Servant and their King. The chief priests had moved the people to make this fatal choice. See the interesting additions in Matthew's Gospel on account of its Jewish-dispensational character.

3. Crowned with thorns and mocked., Mark 15:16-21

Oh! the heart piercing scenes of this section of our Gospel! They led Him away to heap the greatest indignities upon the Holy One. That is man's answer to that service of love and power He so unceasingly had rendered. After the cruel scourging they clothed Him with a purple robe in mockery. Matthew reports a scarlet cloak. This is not a discrepancy. "A scarlet military robe was made to represent the imperial purple, hence the designation, a purple robe. And because this is the symbolic import of the robe, there is no discrepancy" (Lange). The scarlet cloak was used to represent in mockery the imperial purple robe. The crown of thorns was made to inflict cruel pain upon His brow. Thorns came on account of man's sin; they are the signs of the curse. He took the curse upon His own head. Mark tells us most definitely who Simon the Cyrenian was, who was compelled to bear His cross, the father of Alexander and Rufus (see Romans 16:13). God did not forget this service; Simon's sons became believers.

4. Crucified., Mark 15:22-32

It is interesting to note here that Mark speaks of bringing Him to Golgotha. The word translated "bring" really means "bear" (translated thus in Mark 2:3 and Luke 23:26). "And they bear Him unto the place Golgotha." They had to hold Him up. The blessed Servant had spent His strength. What appearance He must have presented after all the scourging and cruel indignities! His face from the awful blows was marred. No wonder that His real human body was weak. But could He succumb? Never. No one could take His life. It could not be touched by man or Satan; death (the result of sin) had no claim on Him. He gave His life for a ransom. Mark also reports exclusively that the wine they offered Him was mingled with myrrh. This was considered an anodyne, to relieve and deaden the pain. The Servant who had come to spend all He had and to give Himself did not need it, but refused the concoction. Mark gives the hour of crucifixion as "the third hour." In John's Gospel (19:14) the sixth hour is mentioned when Pilate said, "Behold your King." The critics triumphantly point to this as a discrepancy. But John gives the Roman way of reckoning the civil day and Mark adheres to the Jewish timekeeping.

The superscription on the cross is the briefest in Mark. He gives the substance of the accusation and not the full wording of it. The perfect Servant who had so fully glorified God and given Himself in all His service, hangs between the two

thieves, who had robbed God and man. How true it was (though they knew it not), “He saved others; Himself He cannot save.” He did not save Himself for He came to die. He was obedient unto death.

5. Obedient unto death, the death of the Cross., Mark 15:33-41

What hours those were! What heart can penetrate its deep mysteries or fathom the depths of the sufferings of the Lamb of God, when He was obedient unto death, the death of the Cross! Nature bears witness to it by the supernatural darkness, for the One who created all things suffers for the creature’s sin. And what a scene in Heaven, when God’s own hand rested upon that One! Worship, praise and adoration is here more in order than an attempt of explanation. He was forsaken of God; and then He paid our penalty and stood in our stead in the presence of a holy God. Never say He was forsaken by His Father. Read John 16:32. The Servant’s cry with a loud voice shows that no one took His life, but that He gave “Himself.” And there was the rent veil from top to bottom (rent by God’s own hand). Then came the utterance of the Centurion: a Gentile confessing Him as Son of God. And the women are mentioned, who had ministered unto Him. The men had fled, the feeble women were there. All service now after the great victory He won, must be in weakness, depending on Him alone.

6. The Burial., Mark 15:42-47

Joseph of Arimathea, like Nicodemus, identified himself with Him, who had died on a cross and confessed Him boldly by this action. In Pilate’s astonishment that He had died so soon we have additional evidence that the Servant “gave His life.” Death by crucifixion, perhaps so often witnessed by the centurion, is a lingering death. They would have given Him the grave of the wicked, but God had predicted it otherwise (Isaiah 53:9 read, “they appointed His grave with the wicked, but with the rich He was when He had died”). The tomb was one in which no other dead had ever been. “The one born of a Virgin-womb could only be fittingly honored in a virgin tomb. He who could not see corruption, could not lie in a tomb which corruption had defiled.”

PART V. THE SERVANT HIGHLY EXALTED. RISEN AND ASCENDED HIS COMMISSION TO HIS SERVANTS AND WORKING WITH THEM

The Sequence of the Events after the Resurrection of Christ

Part I

The four Gospels each contain bits of information about the events occurring after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Putting the four accounts together provides us with a detailed harmonization.

1. **Christ rises from the dead very early Sunday morning.** A violent earthquake and an angel rolling away the stone and sitting upon it accompany this event. The guards are traumatized because they have seen this angel, and they freeze (**Matthew 28:2-4**).
2. **Mary Magdalene and another Mary either walk to the tomb** together or they had planned to meet there. When she (or they) arrives, the stone has been rolled away. (The guards are gone by now.) She returns to find Peter and John and tells them that someone has moved Jesus' body (**John 20:1-2**; **Matthew 28:1**).
3. **Another group of women were scheduled to meet the two Marys at the tomb.** They have acquired spices to complete the burial process, which had been hurried. They are concerned about finding some men to help roll the stone away, since it was large and needed to be rolled against gravity. To their surprise, these women see two angels, only one of which speaks, telling them that Jesus has been raised. The women are scared to death and leave [seeing angels has this effect] (**Mark 16:2-8**; **Luke 24:1-8**, **Matthew 28:5-8**).
4. **Peter and John arrive after being summoned by Mary Magdalene,** who apparently follows them there. John looks into the tomb, but Peter goes inside. All he finds are the burial clothes. They return, confused, but Mary Magdalene apparently stays at the tomb to grieve that someone has removed Jesus' body (**Luke 24:12**, **John 20:3-10**).
5. **Jesus makes His first appearance to Mary Magdalene, after Peter and John have left.** At first she supposes Him to be the gardener, but she is then overjoyed to realize that it is the Lord (**John 20:11-17**, **Mark 16:9**).
6. **Jesus then appears to these other women** who had left before Peter and John had arrived. These are the women who saw the angels. Jesus tells them to communicate that the disciples were to prepare to travel to Galilee (**Matthew 28:9-10**).
7. **The women, joined by Mary Magdalene, report their meeting with Jesus to the disciples,** but they write it off as nonsense (**Mark 16:10-11**, **Luke 24:9-11**, **John 20:18**).

8. **The Roman guards report what they had witnessed to the chief priests.** They were bribed to say that someone stole the body of Jesus while they were asleep. The priests promised the soldiers protection from military discipline through their clout (**Matthew 28:11-15**).

Part II

Combining the summary statements with the specific details provides us with a more detailed harmonization. We looked above at the first eight events. Here are some more.

9. **Jesus appears to Cleopas and his friend** (**Luke 24: 13-22**, **Mark 16:12-13**). This is on the afternoon of that first Easter Sunday as these two disciples were traveling toward Emmaus.
10. **These two disciples make a report to the eleven apostles that evening** (**Mark 16:13**, **Luke 24:33-35**).
11. **He appeared to the ten apostles,** (**Mark 16:14**, **Luke 24:36-43**, **John 20:19-25**) either while Cleopas and his friend were still there or afterward. The eleven apostles are discussing this claim during the evening of that same Easter day. They had the doors locked, fearful that the Jews might plot against them and arrest them.

    Jesus appears to the ten apostles (Thomas is absent), but they presume He is a ghost. He encourages them to look at His hands, feet, and side. He insists that they touch them. But this still does not convince the apostles that He is really risen. He eats with them, and the reality of the resurrection registers with them. They are overjoyed. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon them.
12. **A week later, on a Sunday, Jesus appears to the disciples with Thomas present. Doubting Thomas becomes convinced** (**John 20:26-29**).
13. **About two weeks later, Jesus appears to the disciples while fishing and eats with them. Jesus gives Peter a chance to "undo" his three denials by three affirmations of his love for Jesus** (**John 21**).

There are several other appearances of Jesus mentioned in Scripture, including His appearance to a large crowd of over 500 (**1 Corinthians 15:6**). He appeared individually to His brother James (**1 Corinthians 15:5**) and Peter. He appeared to Paul after the ascension (**1 Corinthians 15:8**). He also appeared to present the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:19-20**) and then during His ascension from the Mount of Olives (**Acts 1:6-11**). As a matter of fact, **Acts 1:3** summarizes as follows: **"After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many**

convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God.”

Why does Jesus eat with the disciples on several occasions? Is He hungry? No. The reason Christ eats with them is twofold: first, to convince them that He is physical. They are not seeing some ghost or apparition. Secondly, food is often associated with fellowship, like it or not. In almost all cultures, there is something special about eating a meal together.



The Garden Tomb *is one of two locations held to possibly be the site of Jesus' tomb. It, by far, looks the best as it still has the look and feel of how the garden tomb may have appeared. Appearance aside, it does not have the history of the other (more probable) site.*

The other location which has been held for far longer in Christian tradition as being the site, is covered by a shrine [church] that has virtually obliterated its original look. The site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (alt. Church of the Holy Sepulchre) holds the weight of history from shortly after the time of Christ. In fact, in 135 A.D., the (Pagan) Roman emperor Hadrian destroyed Jerusalem, and rebuilt the city as Aelia Capitolina. He specifically built his

pagan shrines over this site because it was held to be the location of Calvary and the tomb. In 326-335 A.D. the location was re-identified, the shrines removed, and a new Christian shrine was erected, of which the church located there today is the successor. This church is controlled, and divided in space and use, by multiple denominations (Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Roman Catholics, Copts, Ethiopians and Syrian Orthodox). [photo of church below]. See for trivia regarding the usage of this church.

When the pagan shrines were cleared away in the early fourth century few expected to find any trace of the original tomb. To their surprise the tombs shown below where found and also the one identified as being used by Jesus. How was it known? It was the only one found there with a rolling stone! Fragments of the rolling stone are still in the possession of the church (fragments because pilgrims kept breaking of pieces for relics and souvenirs in ancient times).

> *Mark 16:2-4 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" 4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.*

Rolling stone tombs were in fact quite rare during that period. Out of all the period tombs excavated in Jerusalem and area only a handful had a rolling stone, the remainder having rectangular stones that were merely pushed into place. Interestingly all the tombs found with a rolling stone were those of rich or prominent individuals/families. Perhaps this was due to the fact it would have cost more to have a stone shaped to round. Jesus, of course, was buried in one such tomb...

> *Luke 23:50-53 Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, 51 who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. 52 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. 53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid.*



Chapter 16

16.The Servant's resurrection

Verses 1-8. His resurrection

Verses 9-20. His post-resurrection appearances

*1. The Resurrection and His Manifestation. (*Mark 16:1-13. Matthew 28:1-8*;* Luke 24:1-35*;* John 20:1-18.*)*

*2. The Commission. (*Mark 16:9-18. Luke 24:36-49*;* John 20:19-29.*)*

*3. The Ascension. (*Mark 16:19-20. Luke 24:50-53*)*

1. The Resurrection and His Manifestation., Mark 16:1-8

Again we notice the brevity of Mark's account of the Resurrection of the Lord. The resurrection of Him who saved and toiled so patiently, who was cast out of

His own city and suffered and died on the cross, was the fullest vindication of His person. A still greater vindication lies in the future, when He returns in power and glory. By His resurrection He was declared the Son of God (Romans 1:4). Had He not risen in the same body He had taken on in incarnation, His death on the cross would have no more power for redemption than the death of any other human being (1 Corinthians 15:12-20). His resurrection is also the completest proof that His work on the cross is accepted by God. The women last mentioned at the cross are the first at the tomb. In the first eight verses the Lord Himself is not mentioned as being seen. The stone rolled away, the empty tomb and the angel's words declare that He is risen indeed. In Mark, Peter is specially mentioned, "but go your way, tell His disciples and Peter." Peter's denial is described by Mark in the fullest way. How fitting that he should record the divinely sent message to Peter. What comfort and peace it must have brought to sorrowing Peter.

Higher criticism declares that the proper ending of the Gospel of Mark is Mark 16:8. They disputed the genuineness of Mark 16:9-20. Another hand, they claim, added later these verses. That spurious translation, which goes under the name of "The Twentieth Century New Testament" (wholly unsatisfactory) also gives this portion as "a late appendix." It is not. Mark wrote it and some of the best scholars have declared that it is genuine. How foolish to assume that the blessed document, which begins with the sublime statement "The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" could end with "they were afraid!" The trouble with these critics is that they approach the Word of God with doubt and reject its inspiration.

2. The Commission., Mark 16:9-18

To her who came to the tomb very early in the morning He appeared first. Mary Magdalene had been under the control of demons in a most awful way. She is there as a trophy of His Power over Satan; as the mighty victor over Satan He appeared first to her. Knowing Him and His power as well as the risen One, He sends her forth with the glad message. This is fully given in the Gospel of John. The disciples did not believe. Then He appeared to the disciples on the way to Emmaus so fully reported in Luke. Even then they did not believe their testimony. He appeared unto the eleven as they were at meat and at that time He gave them the commission. But before He upbraided them with their unbelief. How it must have humbled them. And such weak, unbelieving, doubting men the perfect Servant sent forth to preach the Gospel to every creature. The commission differs in many ways from that given in the Kingdom Gospel of Matthew. In Mark the Kingdom is not in view, the Servant has served, He has given His life for a ransom and upon that the good news goes forth. The

message is to be believed and faith confessed. He that believeth not shall be damned. Signs were to follow them (but not all) that believe and signs did follow. Signs were never universal, not even in the days of the Apostles. The Lord's own sovereign will is over this.

3. The Ascension., Mark 16:19-20

The Gospel of Matthew makes no record of the ascension. If we had only Matthew we would think the Lord still on the earth even as some day He will be earth's glorious King. The Holy Spirit gives through Mark a brief Word on the Return of the Servant-Son to the Glory from where He had come. The Servant who had stooped so low is lifted so high. There at the right hand of God He has taken His place--the Man in Glory. The work is finished. But the word "work" appears once more in this Gospel. "And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following." Nowhere else in the Gospels is the statement given that the risen One works with His servants. How fitting that the Holy Spirit put it at the close of the Gospel of the Servant. He came from God to take the Servant's place; He served on earth; He sacrificed Himself for our sins, and now as His servants go forth to serve in His name He still works with them. What joy it ought to be for all who love and adore Him to be obedient to such a Lord, who was such a Servant on earth and whose delight is still to serve.

Questionnaire

Matthew's Gospel

1. What were the key events in the life of Jesus Christ?
2. Why did God give us four Gospels?
3. What is the harmony of the Gospels?
4. When were the Gospels written?
5. Is there an error in the counting of the generations in Matthew chapter 1?
6. Why are Jesus' genealogies in Matthew and Luke so different?
7. How old was Mary when Jesus was born?
8. When were Joseph and Mary considered married?
9. What does it mean to be "fishers of men"?

10. Who were the twelve (12) disciples / apostles of Jesus Christ?
11. What should we learn from the life of John the Baptist?
12. What was the meaning and importance of the baptism of John the Baptist?
13. What is the baptism of/by/with fire?
14. What was the meaning and purpose of Jesus' temptations?
15. How many times did Jesus cleanse the temple? Why did He cleanse the temple?
16. What is the Sermon on the Mount?
17. What are the beatitudes?
18. What does ‘blessed are the meek’ mean?
19. What does ‘blessed are the peacemakers’ mean?
20. What does ‘blessed are the merciful’ mean?
21. What does ‘blessed are those who mourn’ mean?
22. What does it mean to be pure in heart?
23. What does it mean to be poor in spirit?
24. What did Jesus mean when He instructed us to turn the other cheek?
25. What did Jesus mean when He instructed us to love our enemies?
26. What does it mean that believers are to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16)?
27. Did Jesus contradict the Law in Matthew 5:21-22?
28. Why did Jesus warn against saying the word *raca* in Matthew 5:22?
29. How can we store up treasures in heaven?
30. What did Jesus mean when He said the eye is the lamp of the body (Matthew 6:22)?
31. If I do not forgive others, does that mean my sins are not forgiven? What does Matthew 6:14-15 mean?

32. What is mammon?

33. Just how narrow is the narrow gate?

34. What did Jesus mean when He said to "not cast your pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6)?

35. What did Jesus mean when He told us to ask, seek, and knock?

36. What did Jesus mean when He said "Ask and you shall receive"?

37. Does Matthew 7:21-23 mean that believers can lose salvation?

38. What does the Bible mean when it refers to the gnashing of teeth?

39. What did Jesus mean by coming to bring a sword in Matthew 10:34-36?

40. What did Jesus mean when He said it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven?

41. What does it mean when Jesus says “my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30)?

42. What does it mean that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath?

43. What can we learn from Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000?

44. What is the significance of Jesus calming the storm?

45. What was the meaning of Jesus walking on water?

46. What is the sign of Jonah?

47. Did Jesus come only for the Jews and not the Gentiles?

48. What are idle words (Matthew 12:36)?

49. Why did Jesus say that He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24)?

50. Why did Jesus teach in parables?

51. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Dragnet?

52. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Leaven?

53. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Unforgiving / Unmerciful Servant?

54. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Rich Fool?

55. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Mustard Seed?

56. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Talents?

57. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats?

58. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Ten Virgins?

59. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Vineyard?

60. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Wedding Feast?

61. How should Christians handle disputes (Matthew 18:15-17)?

62. What is the outer darkness in Matthew 22:13?

63. What is the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares?

64. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Two Sons?

65. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard?

66. What is the meaning of the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price?

67. What are the keys of the kingdom?

68. What did Jesus mean when He said that we should forgive others seventy times seven?

69. Why are there two demon-possessed men in the Gerasene tombs in Matthew, but only one in Mark and Luke?

70. Why did Jesus allow the demons to enter the herd of pigs?

71. Why did Jesus tell the rich young ruler he could be saved by obeying the commandments?

72. What does it mean to have mustard seed faith?

73. Did Jesus heal two blind men (Matthew 20:29-34) or one blind man (Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43)?

74. Why is Jesus called the stumbling stone in Matthew 21:43-44?
75. What did Jesus mean when He said the first will be last and the last will be first?
76. What does “Many are called but few are chosen” in Matthew 22:14 mean?
77. Why did Jesus say to Peter, “Get behind me Satan”?
78. What are the gates of hell?
79. What happened on the Mount of Olives?
80. What is the Olivet Discourse?
81. What did Jesus mean when He said, "this generation will not pass"?
82. Is it possible to know when Jesus is coming back?
83. Was Jesus' statement to the disciples in Luke 9:27 (also Matthew 16:28; Mark 9:1) incorrect?
84. Can faith really move mountains?
85. What is the greatest commandment?
86. What does it mean to love your neighbour as you love yourself?
87. What was the meaning and importance of the transfiguration?
88. What trials did Jesus face before His crucifixion?
89. If Jesus was God, why did He not know when He would return?
90. If Jesus was God, why did He call God "My God?"
91. Did Jesus mean that we should never refer to our earthly father as “father” (Matthew 23:9)?
92. What is an alabaster box?
93. What is the significance of the triumphal entry?
94. Who are the "least of these" in the Bible?
95. What happened in the upper room?

96. Are the Jews cursed because they killed Christ and asked for “His blood to be on us,” according to Matthew 27:25?

97. What happened during Jesus’ last hours on earth?

98. What was the reason behind Peter's denial of Jesus?

99. Who helped Jesus carry the cross?

100. What are the last seven sayings of Christ and what do they mean?

101. Why did Jesus say, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me'?

102. What is the meaning of those who were raised to life at Jesus’ death (Matthew 27:52-53)?

103. Should we be baptized in Jesus' name (Acts 2:38), or in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19)?

104. Can the various resurrection accounts from the four Gospels be harmonized?

Mark’s Gospel

1. Why did God give us four Gospels?
2. What is the harmony of the Gospels?
3. When were the Gospels written?
4. What should we learn from the life of John the Baptist?
5. What were the key events in the life of Jesus Christ?
6. Why did Jesus refer to James and John as the sons of thunder?
7. What does it mean to be “fishers of men”?
8. Who were the twelve (12) disciples / apostles of Jesus Christ?
9. What does it mean that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath?
10. What was the meaning and purpose of Jesus' temptations?
11. What is the significance of Jesus calming the storm?
12. What was the meaning of Jesus walking on water?
13. Why did Jesus teach in parables?

14. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29)?
15. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Mustard Seed?
16. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Sower?
17. What is the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares?
18. What is the meaning of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard?
19. What is the meaning of the parables of fasting at the wedding feast, the old cloth, and the wineskins?
20. Why are there two demon-possessed men in the Gerasene tombs in Matthew, but only one in Mark and Luke?
21. What can we learn from Jesus' feeding of the 5,000?
22. What is the meaning of the story of the woman with the issue of blood?
23. What does Corban mean in Mark 7:11?
24. Why did Jesus spit for some of His miracles?
25. Why did Jesus allow the demons to enter the herd of pigs?
26. What is the worm that will not die in Mark 9:48?
27. Did Jesus heal two blind men (Matthew 20:29-34) or one blind man (Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43)?
28. Why did Jesus tell the rich young ruler he could be saved by obeying the commandments?
29. What is an alabaster box?
30. What is the significance of the triumphal entry?
31. What happened in the upper room?
32. What does it mean that God is our Abba Father?
33. Who was the young man who fled naked in Mark 14:51-52?

34. What was the reason behind Peter's denial of Jesus?

35. Who helped Jesus carry the cross?

36. What happened during Jesus' last hours on earth?

37. What are the last seven sayings of Christ and what do they mean?

38. Can the various resurrection accounts from the four Gospels be harmonized?

39. Should Mark 16:9-20 be in the Bible?

40. What does the Bible say about snake handling? Should we be handling snakes in church?

41. Does Mark 16:16 teach that baptism is necessary for salvation?

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